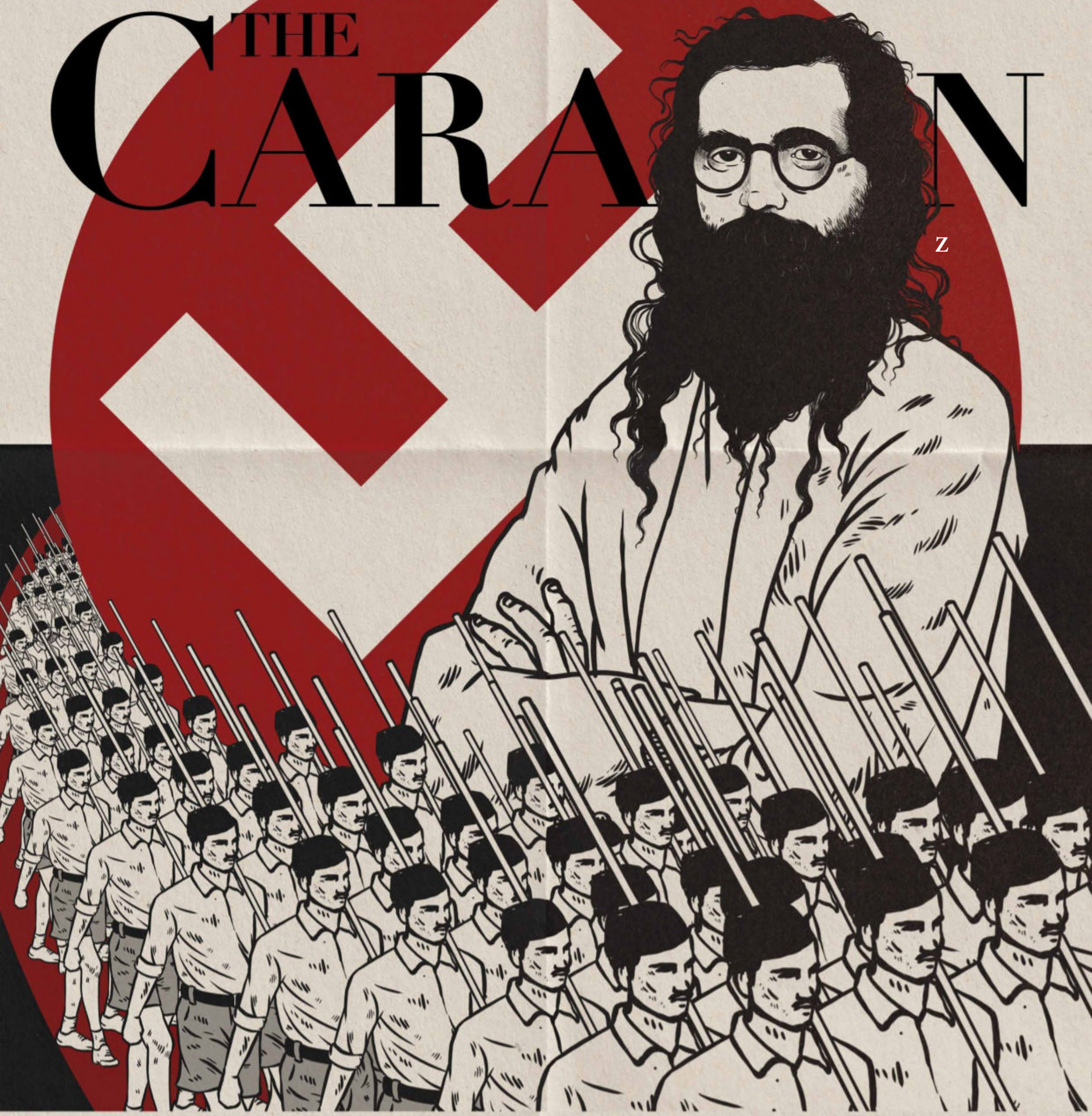
AUGUST 2021
A JOURNAL OF POLITICS
AND CULTURE

The Naga peace process in peril p. 20

Playing politics with judicial commissions p. 56

₹150

THE CARAVAN



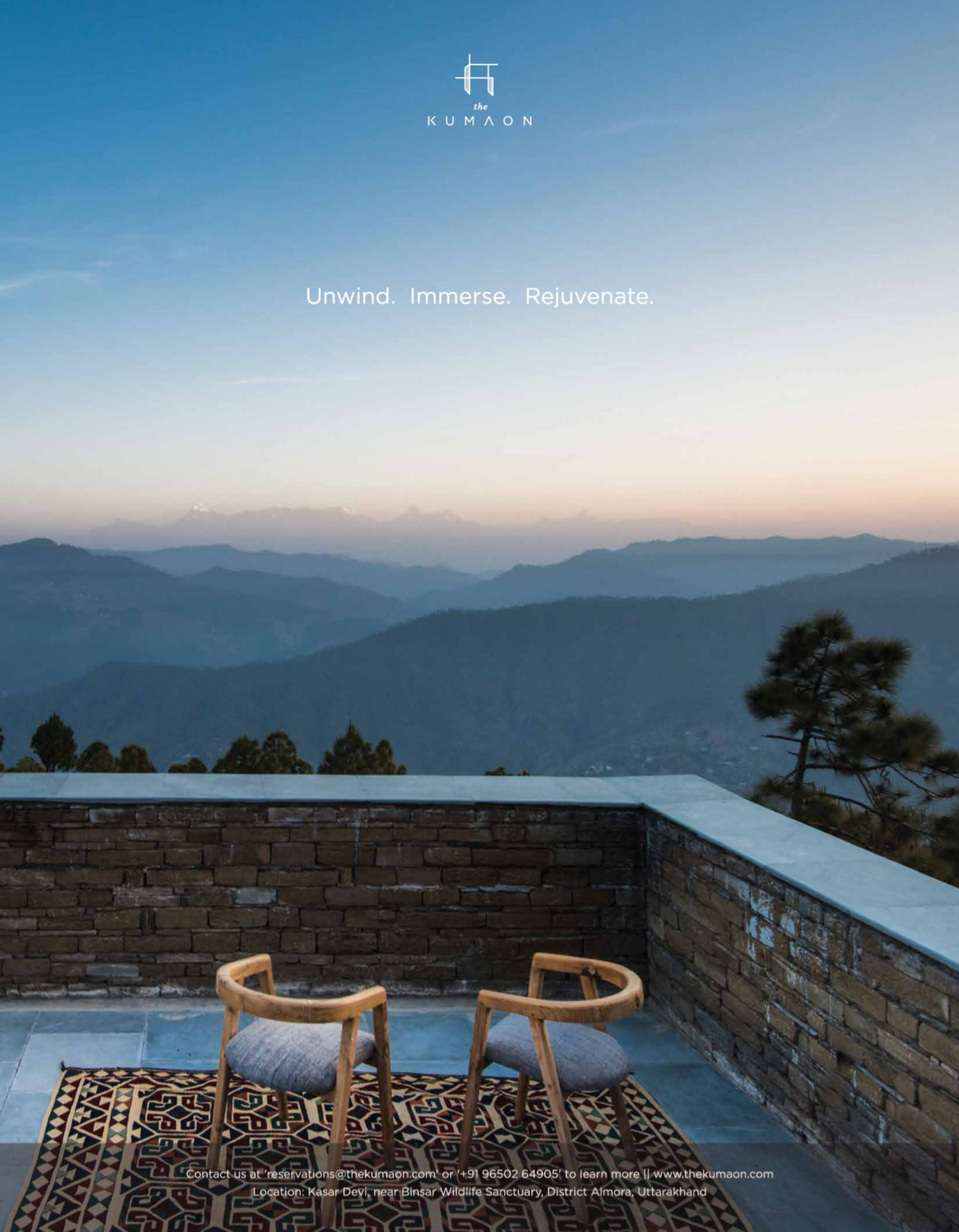
GURUJI'S LIE

THE RSS'S NAZI HERITAGE

SHOUT
SHARE
IT

the KUMAON

Unwind. Immerse. Rejuvenate.



Contact us at 'reservations@thekumaon.com' or '+91 96502 64905' to learn more || www.thekumaon.com
Location: Kasar Devi, near Binsar Wildlife Sanctuary, District Almora, Uttarakhand

THE CARAVAN

Founder: Vishva Nath (1917-2002)
Editor-in-Chief, Publisher & Printer: Paresh Nath

VOLUME 13 • ISSUE 8
AUGUST 2021

COVER STORY / HISTORY

38
Guruji's Lie

The RSS and MS Golwalkar's undeniable links to Nazism

DHIRENDRA K JHA

It has remained a long-standing puzzle whether the book We or Our Nationhood Defined *was authored by MS Golwalkar, the second chief of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, or was just his translation of a Marathi book written by Ganesh Savarkar, a founding member of the RSS. This is no ordinary authorship dispute. The book was heavily inspired by the German fascist ideology of the Nazis, and recommended that India deal with minorities the way Nazi Germany dealt with Jews. Golwalkar disowned the book after Gandhi's assassination, at a time when the RSS and the Nazis had become increasingly reviled. However, a comparison of* We *to Savarkar's work, along with a mountain of other historical evidence, proves beyond doubt that Golwalkar indeed was its author. The book's dangerous ideas remain an integral part of the RSS's worldview, and of its hopes for India.*

POLITICS
56 **Commissions of Untruth**
The politics of India's ad-hoc judicial inquiries
SHUBHANKAR DAM

PERSPECTIVES

POLITICS
20 **In Pieces**
The Naga peace process faces another collapse
KUMAR SANJAY SINGH

EDUCATION
25 **Failing the Grade**
The Kalinga Institute of Social Sciences' approach to tribal people makes it no place for an anthropological conference
VIRGINIUS XAXA

HISTORY
28 **Make Do and Mend**
The Central Vista redevelopment reveals the lack of conservation studies and layering in India's history writing
NAMAN P AHUJA

THE LEDE

GENDER

8 Made in Crisis

COVID-19 is leading to a rise in child marriages in India

VARSHA BANSAL

COMMUNITIES

10 Ground Reality

Cemetery workers struggle to keep up with Mumbai's COVID-19 deaths

ARMAN KHAN

ARTS

12 Sample Space

A dance group aims to bridge Afrobeats and Bollywood

SHAISTHA KHAN

COMMUNITIES

14 Demolition Row

Karachi's double standards over land encroachment

FAWAD HASAN

PHOTO ESSAY / HEALTH

68 Battling the Wave

Healthcare efforts fighting the COVID-19 crisis in rural India

HARSHA VADLAMANI

THE BOOKSHELF 96

EDITOR'S PICK 98

BOOKS

LITERATURE

88 The Uses of Laughter

PG Wodehouse and the comic tradition

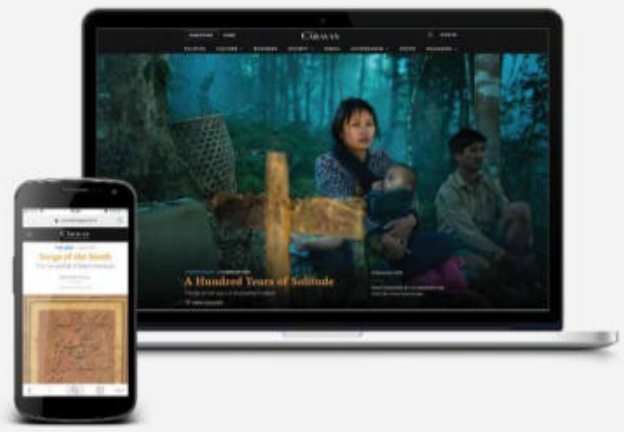
SHASHANK KELA

True media needs true allies.

India needs bold, fair journalism more than ever.
We need allies like **YOU**.

THE CARAVAN

DIGITAL PLANS



+ Unlimited access to all stories on *The Caravan* website (including archives)

RECOMMENDED

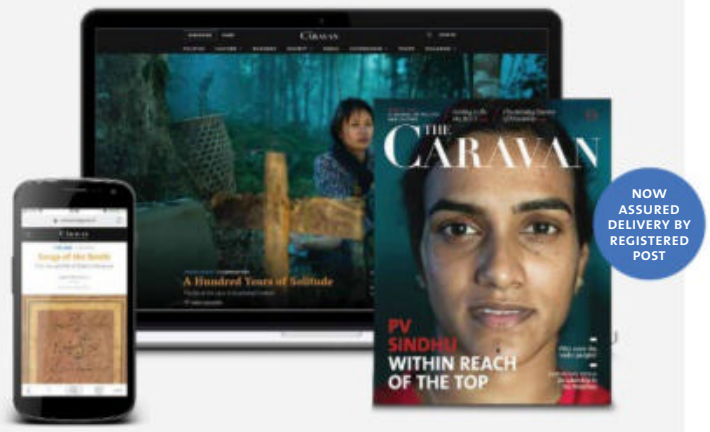
☐ **ANNUAL**
at just ₹3.28/day.
ONLY **₹1200** ~~₹1800~~

☐ **2 YEARS**
at just ₹3.08/day.
ONLY **₹2250** ~~₹3600~~

☐ **3 YEARS**
at just ₹2.74/day.
ONLY **₹3000** ~~₹5400~~

Please fill in this order form and mail it with your remittance to Delhi Prakashan Vitran Pvt. Ltd., E-8, Jhandewalan Estate, Rani Jhansi Marg, New Delhi-110055

DIGITAL + PRINT PLANS



+ Unlimited access to all stories on *The Caravan* website (including archives)
+ Home delivery of monthly print issues

☐ **ANNUAL**
at just ₹4.93/day.
ONLY **₹1800** ~~₹3600~~

☐ **3 YEARS**
at just ₹4.11/day.
ONLY **₹4500** ~~₹10800~~

☐ **ANNUAL**
OVERSEAS PACKAGE
at just $0.35/day.
ONLY **$128**

☐ **3 YEAR**
OVERSEAS PACKAGE
at just $0.28/day.
ONLY **$305**

Name: _____

E-mail: _____

Mobile No.: _____

Address: _____

_____

Payment Mode:

☐ Paytm (Transaction ID: _____)

☐ Cheque/DD (Cheque/DD No.: _____)
*Favouring DELHI PRAKSHAN VITRAN PVT. LTD payable at par

Please Note:

- It will take 5-7 working days to process your subscription.
- You will receive an email and SMS on your registered e-mail ID and mobile number, respectively. Kindly ensure that you have entered your primary correspondence.
- For further information, please contact our subscription department. Phone (Toll free number) : 1800 103 880. Landline: 011 41398888 (extn: 119/221/264) Mobile/SMS/WhatsApp: 08588843408. Email: subscription@delhipress.in. You can also subscribe online at www.delhipress.in.subscribe
- *For Speed Post, kindly pay an additional sum of ₹70, per edition for less than 1000 kms and ₹100, per edition for beyond 1000 kms. (For subscription in India only)

THE CARAVAN

CONTRIBUTORS

THE LEDE

8 **Varsha Bansal** is an independent journalist based in Bengaluru.

10 **Arman Khan** is a Mumbai-based journalist who covers the intersection of gender, travel, sexuality, queer culture, and lifestyle. His work has appeared in publications such as *Them*, *Vice* and *Femina*, and the Indian editions of *Vogue*, *GQ*, *Grazia*, *Architectural Digest* and *Condé Nast Traveller*.

12 **Shaistha Khan** is a freelance culture writer who writes on Saudi Arabia, the wider Gulf region and the South Asia diaspora. Her work has appeared in publications including *Shondaland*, *Teen Vogue*, *Travel + Leisure*, *Harper's Bazaar Arabia* and *The National*.

14 **Fawad Hasan** is a journalist based in Karachi, working on stories related to labour and human rights.

PERSPECTIVES

20 **Kumar Sanjay Singh** is an associate professor of history at Swami Sharddhanand College, Delhi University.

25 **Virginius Xaxa** is a former professor of sociology at the Delhi School of Economics and the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Guwahati.

28 **Naman P Ahuja** is a curator and professor of Indian visual culture at Jawaharlal Nehru University. His teaching and exhibitions are known for bringing a contemporary relevance to the study of ancient Indian iconography and aesthetics.

REPORTAGE AND ESSAYS

38 **Dhirendra K Jha** is a political journalist. He is the author of *Shadow Armies: Fringe Organizations and Foot Soldiers of Hindutva* and a co-author of *Ayodhya: The Dark Night*. His latest book is *Ascetic Games: Sadhus, Akharas and the Making of the Hindu Vote*.

56 **Shubhankar Dam** is a chair professor of public law and governance at the University of Portsmouth, United Kingdom.

PHOTO ESSAY

68 **Harsha Vadlamani** is an independent photojournalist whose current work focuses on agrarian crises, migration, health and the environment across India. His work has appeared in *National Geographic*, *New York Times Magazine*, the *Wall Street Journal*, *GEO*, *Al Jazeera*, *Le Monde*, the *Financial Times*, *Scientific American* and *Wired*, among other publications.

BOOKS

88 **Shashank Kela** is the author of a historical monograph, *A Rogue and Peasant Slave: Adivasi Resistance 1800-2000* (2012), and a novel, *The Other Man* (2017).

COVER

Illustration: MadPaule

EDITOR **Anant Nath**
EXECUTIVE EDITOR **Vinod K Jose**
POLITICAL EDITOR **Hartosh Singh Bal**
SENIOR ASSOCIATE EDITOR **Roman Gautam**
DEPUTY POLITICAL EDITOR **Praveen Donthi**
BOOKS EDITOR **Maya Palit**
CREATIVE DIRECTOR **Tanvi Mishra**
SENIOR ASSISTANT EDITORS
Martand Kaushik and Puja Sen
COPY EDITORS **Ajachi Chakrabarti and Akash Poyam**
WEB EDITOR **Surabhi Kanga**
ASSISTANT EDITORS (WEB)
Arshu John and Tusha Mittal
CONTRIBUTING EDITORS
Deborah Baker, Fatima Bhutto, Chandrahas Choudhury, Siddhartha Deb, Sadanand Dhume, Siddharth Dube, Christophe Jaffrelot, Mira Kamdar, Miranda Kennedy, Amitava Kumar, Basharat Peer, Samanth Subramanian and Salil Tripathi
CONTRIBUTING WRITERS **Prabhjit Singh and Jatinder Kaur Tur**
STAFF WRITERS **Atul Dev, Nikita Saxena and Sagar**
REPORTING FELLOW (NORTH INDIA)
Tushar Dhara
REPORTING FELLOW (GOVERNMENT)
Nileena MS
REPORTING FELLOW (SOUTH INDIA)
Aathira Konikkara
REPORTING FELLOW (HEALTH) **Chahat Rana**
EDITORIAL FELLOW (HEALTH) **Nayantara Narayanan**
REPORTING FELLOWS **Sunil Kashyap and Lalnunkimi Colney**
EDITORIAL FELLOWS **Amrita Singh, Mehak Mahajan and Abhay Regi**
MULTIMEDIA PRODUCER (FELLOW)
CK Vijayakumar
MULTIMEDIA REPORTER **Shahid Tantray**
MULTIMEDIA EDITOR (FELLOW)
Nabeela Paniyath
FACT-CHECKING FELLOWS
Ahan Penkar and Armanur Rahman
SOCIAL-MEDIA MANAGEMENT AND ENGAGEMENT FELLOW **Karishma Koshal**
SENIOR SOFTWARE ENGINEER
Anjaneya Sivan
PHOTO RESEARCHER (FELLOW) **Utkarsh**
GRAPHIC DESIGNERS **Paramjeet Singh and Sukruti Anah Staneley**
ASSISTANT EDITOR (HINDI) **Vishnu Sharma**
HINDI TRANSLATOR **Parijat P**
TRAINEE JOURNALIST (HINDI) **Ankita Chauhan**
EDITORIAL MANAGER **Haripriya KM**
DEPUTY EDITORIAL MANAGER **Vidhya CK**
EDITORIAL INTERNS **Sushovan Patnaik, Arpan Sharma and Amitoj Singh**
SOCIAL-MEDIA INTERN **Shafin Shamsudheen**

editor.thecaravan@delhipress.in

facebook.com/TheCaravanMagazine

@thecaravanindia

SUBSCRIBE subscription@delhipress.in **WEBSITE** www.caravanmagazine.in

EDITED, PRINTED & PUBLISHED BY
Paresh Nath on behalf of Delhi Press Patra Prakashan Pvt. Ltd. E-8, Jhandewalan Estate, New Delhi - 110055 and
PRINTED AT PS PC Press Pvt. Ltd., DLF 50, Industrial Area, Faridabad, Haryana - 121003 and **PUBLISHED AT** Delhi Press Patra Prakashan Pvt. Ltd. E-8 Jhandewalan Estate, New Delhi - 110055
EDITORIAL, ADVERTISEMENT & PUBLICATION OFFICE
E-8, Jhandewalan Estate, Rani Jhansi Marg, New Delhi - 110055, Phone: 41398888, 23529557
email: advertising@delhipressgroup.com

Other Offices
AHMEDABAD: 31, Ground Floor, Narayan Chamber, Nehru Bridge Corner, Ashram Road, Ahmedabad - 380009
BANGALORE: Flat No. 001, Ravi Kiran Apartments, No. 12, Plain Street, Off Infantry Road, Bangalore - 560001
CHENNAI: 14, First Floor, Cison's Complex, Montieth Road, Chennai - 600008 Phone: 044 - 28554448
PATNA: 12, Ashiana Tower, Exhibition Road, Patna - 800001
MUMBAI: A 4, Shriram Industrial Estate, Wadala, Mumbai - 400031 Phone: 022 - 24100844
KOLKATA: 16 A, Amrita Banerjee Road, Kalighat, Kolkata - 700026
KOCHI: G-7, Pioneer Towers, 1, Marine Drive, Kochi - 682031, Phone: 0484 - 2371537
LUCKNOW: B-G/3, 4, Sapru Marg, Lucknow - 226001, Phone: 0522 - 4045544
SECUNDERABAD: 122, Chenoy Trade Centre, 116, Park Lane, Secunderabad - 500003 Phone: 040 - 27841596, Mobile: 8688065543
JAIPUR: Geetanjali Tower, Shop No 114 Opp. Vyas Hospital, Ajmer Road, Jaipur - 302006, Phone: 0141 - 3296580, Mobile: 9529020226
BHOPAL: B-31, Vardhawan, Green Park, Ashoka Garden, Bhopal - 462023

Title *The Caravan* is registered with Govt. of India as trade mark.

ISSN 0971-0639

Rates
INLAND One copy ₹150. 75 p. per copy air surcharge in following areas: Silchar, Dibrugarh, Agartala, Tezpur, Imphal, Akaras and Nepal.
INTERNATIONAL SUBSCRIPTION AIRMAIL US $ 75 (12 Issues)
EXPRESS DELIVERY SAARC COUNTRIES US $ 140 (12 Issues)
EXPRESS DELIVERY EUROPE & SOUTH AMERICA US $ 219 (12 Issues)
EXPRESS DELIVERY TO THE REST OF THE WORLD US $ 219 (12 Issues)
SUBSCRIPTION should be remitted through money orders, cheques/ bank drafts drawn in favour of Delhi Prakashan Vitran Pvt. Ltd. at E-8, Jhandewalan Estate, New Delhi - 110055

Copyright notice
© Delhi Press Patra Prakashan Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi - 110055. INDIA.

All materials published in this magazine (including, but not limited to articles, quotations, extracts, or any parts of the article, photographs, images, illustrations also known as the "Content") are protected by copyright, and owned by **DELHI PRESS PATRA PRAKASHAN PVT. LTD.**

You may not modify, publish, transmit, participate in the transfer or sale of, reproduce create new works from, distribute, perform, display, or in any way exploit, any of the Content in whole or in part.

This copy is sold on the condition that the jurisdiction for all disputes concerning sale, subscription and published matter will be settled in courts/forums/tribunals at Delhi.

Readers are recommended to make appropriate enquiries and take appropriate advice before sending their money, incurring any expense or entering into a binding commitment in relation to an advertisement. *The Caravan* magazine shall not be liable to any person for loss or damage incurred as a result of his/her accepting or offering to accept an invitation contained in any advertisement published in *The Caravan*.

Thank you for supporting *The Caravan*

Anuradha

The more you can help, the more we can do

We cannot do this without you. We investigate powerful people, uncover scams, hold governments to account and report hard facts on conflicts and crises, all because we are independent of any outside interests. And since we answer to nobody but you, our readers, we need your support to keep our journalism alive.

Contribute here, caravanmagazine.in

THE LEDE

Made in Crisis

COVID-19 is leading to a rise in child marriages in India / **Gender**

/ **VARSHA BANSAL**

One morning in April, an anxious 15-year-old girl boarded a bus by herself, near her parents' home in Fatehnagar, a town in Rajasthan. After being beaten and forced to get married by her parents—both daily-wage workers—she realised the only way to slip out of this situation and continue with her education was to make a run for it. Soon after boarding the local bus, she called a local anti-child-marriage activist and told her she would reach their office in roughly two hours.

"I was scared and didn't know what to do," the young adolescent, who dreams of becoming a police officer someday, told me. "This was the only thing I could think of." Her brother's wedding had been fixed, and her parents, who have not been able to earn much due to the lack of work during the COVID-19 pandemic, thought they could use the dowry money to get their daughter married.

As the pandemic ravages India, leading to lockdowns and school closures, it has resulted in an unexpected problem: underage girls being married off by their families as a way out of financial stress. India, the highest contributor to child marriages in the world as per a 2019 UNICEF report, is not alone in this current predicament. There has been a surge in child marriages in several other developing nations, including Nepal, Ethiopia and Malawi. A recent UNICEF report warns that the pandemic has put 10 million young girls around the world at risk of becoming child brides over the next decade.

The 15 year old has been among the fortunate ones from Rajasthan's Mavli district to have escaped this fate. But many others have not been as lucky. In the same district, at least twenty-five child marriages have taken place in the last two months, according to the local activists Usha Choudhary and Yogesh Vaishnav. The activists told me that most low-income families from this region believe they can lessen their financial burden by getting their daughters married sooner, with social-distancing measures allowing them to save money by having a small ceremony.

Rajasthan has one of the highest percentage of girls married under the age of 18 among Indian states—36 percent, according to a UNICEF report—and the pandemic has only exacerbated the situation, changing the course of several young girls' lives. "They are concerned that their daughters are sitting at home, they are more vulnerable, so might as well get them married," Choudhary, the founder of Vikalp Sansthan—an organisation working for girls' and women's rights—and the person who the 15-year-old girl had called for help, told me. "In many cases, there are girls who accept their fate and do as they are told by their parents, but some others call us or give tip-offs and we intervene."

Currently, there is no official data on the alarming rise of underage marriages during the pandemic. However, a recent report by *The Wire* revealed that the number of child marriages across India from June to October 2020 increased by over a third compared to the same period in 2019. The report, based on a right-to-information request filed with the ministry of women and child development, also noted that August 2020 alone saw an increase in child marriages by almost ninety percent. Anecdotal evidence suggests that, in 2021, several states such as Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Tamil Nadu continue to witness a rise in such marriages. According to Choudhary and Vaishnav, there are also instances of young girls being forced to move in with their husbands during the pandemic, much before they reach legal marriageable age.

"With families facing economic hardships, incidents of domestic violence, drunk behaviour and child abuse are rising," Safeena Husain, the founder of the NGO Educate Girls, told me. "If this persists, the risks of child marriage, physical and sexual exploitation of girls and trafficking will continue to surge drastically."

Rates of child marriage are strongly correlated to the occurrence of disasters. "Whenever there is a crisis in India, we have noticed that child marriages and child trafficking go up," Vaishnav said. "We have seen this happen during earthquakes and other calamities—women and young girls are always the worst impacted."

Numbers convey a similar tale. According to a recent paper by researchers from Georgetown University, the 2008 flooding of the Kosi River led to a 3.6-percent increase in the incidence of female-child marriage in Bihar. Similarly, the 2001 earthquake in Gujarat resulted in women getting married at a younger age. Beyond India, the 2004 tsunami led to minor girls being forced into marriage in Sri Lanka and Indonesia, and the 2014 Ebola outbreak in Sierra Leone resulted in school closures and a subsequent increase in child marriages.

There are a numberof factors that come into play. In the case of the Kosi

PRAKASH HATVALNE / AP PHOTO

floods, "the reaction in the marriage market was routed through dowry," Madhulika Khanna, one of the co-authors of the paper, told me. "More people were willing to marry their younger sons for dowry but, with families not being able to pay more dowry, an equilibrium struck and the amount of dowry fell." In such cases, she added, families thought it was better for them to get their daughters married when the dowry was lower than to wait longer, leading to girls getting married at an earlier age.

The deep recession induced in 2020 due to the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic doubled poverty in India, according to a report by the Pew Research Center. Around 135 million Indians presently earn ₹150 or less per day—and 75 million of them were added to this cohort just last year. Migrant labourers and low-income families have had to suffer job losses, and the second wave this year is expected to have worsened the situation.

"It's not like the parents who are marrying them off early don't care about their children—just that in the face of economic shock, this is the best thing they can do for their families," Khanna said. "However, when a woman gets married early, she's more likely to have her first kid at a younger age, and might not complete her education." She added that this could have long-term effects on children's health, education and well-being, and that these effects could be felt across generations.

Meanwhile, some young girls are taking matters into their own hands to navigate these circumstances. For instance, a 16-year-old girl from a village in Mavli, who got married on 7 May, struck a deal with her parents that she would continue to stay with them and study until she reaches the legal age to move in with her husband and in-laws. "Many girls I have interacted with are coming up with ways to continue their education and smartly deal with this problem," Choudhary told me.

The 15 year old, who used to walk to the government school in her neighbourhood prior to the lockdown, is currently stuck at home, waiting for schools to reopen. Choudhary took her parents to the Child Welfare Committee and had them agree in writing to not get their daughter married until she reaches the legal age. But Choudhary makes surprise visits to keep a check. The 15 year old is hopeful about her future now. "I want to be able to help other women when I grow up and become a police officer," she told me. ■

ABOVE: A recent report by *The Wire* revealed that the number of child marriages across India from June to October 2020 increased by over a third compared to the same period in 2019.

Ground Reality

Cemetery workers struggle to keep up with Mumbai's COVID-19 deaths / Communities

/ ARMAN KHAN

Located next to a multiplex in the posh coastal suburb of Bandra, the 356-year-old Navpada Kokni Kabrastan in Mumbai wears a sullen look. Railway tracks run parallel to its eastern wall, just beyond the section reserved for COVID-19 burials. The cemetery used to be reserved for members of the Konkani Muslim community but, during the pandemic, it opened its doors to all Muslims.

In May 2020, as the cemetery prepared to bury its first COVID-19 victim, it faced unlikely opposition. Sanjay Naik, the secretary of the Mumbai Cricket Association, and some residents of the neighbourhood put up huge locks on the cemetery gates. The cemetery workers filed a police case, and the Bombay High Court eventually ordered that the locks be removed and the cemetery be opened for COVID-19 burials.

"He doesn't even live nearby," an exasperated Maqsood Abdul Sattar Mahimi, one of the cemetery's attendants, told me about Naik's intervention. "How can the dead possibly infect us? All we want here is to facilitate a peaceful transition of the dead to their resting place."

I visited the cemetery during Ramzan this year, when Mahimi and his colleagues were struggling with the devastating second wave. The cemetery was stretched to its limit—by 17 May, Mahimi said, 165 people had been buried in the COVID-19 section. The southern part of the cemetery has been occupied by the families of a previous generation of gravediggers, and a legal battle to reclaim that land is ongoing. "They have the backing of the local corporator and MLA," Mahimi said. "We

barely have space left. If we get more than twenty bodies in the next two weeks, we don't know how we will manage."

Labourers fasting for Ramzan were chiselling away at stray boulders, cutting dead trees and clearing heaps of fallen leaves to make space for the bodies that would eventually arrive. But the most disconcerting sight was that of a freshly dug-up grave. "We always keep one grave ready for the next casualty," Mahimi explained. "In the three-century history of this cemetery, this has never happened. Day or night, we are always on our toes. You can't afford to waste time when the COVID body is here."

A similar sentiment was echoed by Mohammed Alimuddin, a gravedigger at the Andheri Muslim

Labourers fasting for Ramzan were chiselling away at stray boulders, cutting dead trees and clearing fallen leaves to make space for the bodies that would eventually arrive.

Qabristan. Originally from Assam, Alimuddin has spent the last two decades working at the cemetery, which is the resting place for celebrities such as the poet Kaifi Azmi and the music director Khayyam.

For Alimuddin, this Ramzan posed a predicament like no other: the sight of partially decomposed bodies when they sought to make space for new COVID-19 bodies. "We clean the cemetery every two or three years, the assumption being that that is enough time for the bodies to decompose," he told me. "But, this time, we had to dig up the land in just a year and a half because we had run out of space—only to realise that the previous bodies hadn't yet fully decomposed."

Guidelines issued by the government forbid disturbing a grave for 18 months following a burial, but, clearly, even this limit was not enough. Alimuddin had no option but to close the graves again. "It was certainly disturbing," he said. "One would think that twenty years in the gravedigging business would toughen you up, but nothing can prepare you for this."

Other gravediggers told me that, usually, the families of the dead bathe their bodies before they are buried, in accordance with Islamic purification rituals. They can then apply yellow sand, which aids in faster decomposition. However, Shuaib Khatib, the chairman of the Juma Masjid of Bombay Trust—which oversees the Bada Qabrastan in Kalbadevi, one of India's largest cemeteries—said that the pandemic had made this difficult.

"If the yellow sand is applied or not, it doesn't matter with COVID bodies," Khatib, who was asked by the Maharashtra government to formulate a standard operating procedure for COVID-19 burials, told me. "You see, these bodies are not wrapped in the standard coffin cloth, but in PPE kits. The process of decomposition simply cannot happen when there are layers of plastic blocking the path of decomposition agents in the soil."

Alimuddin recalled days when continuously digging graves became almost physically impossible. A few days before we met, he had dug nine graves in a single day, while fasting for Ramzan. He eventually told the cemetery trust that there was absolutely no space left to bury new COVID-19 bodies. "The average for our cemetery is around thirty to forty bodies in a month," he told me. "But, this Ramzan, we had around a hundred and thirty bodies in a month. No cemetery can possibly handle that much load."

Space was not an issue at the Bada Qabrastan, however. Khatib told me that, for the first time, the cemetery had been divided into seven sections—four for general burials, two for COVID-19 bodies and one for unclaimed bodies. A team of 17 gravediggers worked tirelessly around the clock to ensure the burials happened smoothly.

"We are the only cemetery in Mumbai that has carved out an entire space for unknown bodies to be buried," Khatib said. "But, this Ramzan, the number of unknown bodies has doubled." He posited two reasons for this: in some cases, all the members of the deceased's immediate family had succumbed to the virus; in others, their relatives would rather not attend a COVID-19 funeral.

The pressure on Mumbai's cemeteries decreased as the second wave of the pandemic ebbed, but the gravediggers told me that they were apprehensive about a third wave. Body counts may rise and fall with time, but the systemic issues remain the same: people continue to fear contracting COVID-19 from dead bodies, there is not enough space or manpower to handle a surge in demand, and land sharks are always on the prowl. ■

OPPOSITE PAGE:
The Muslim Qabristan in Andheri's DN Nagar used to bury thirty to forty bodies in a month on average, but, this Ramzan, it received around a hundred and thirty bodies due to COVID-19.

AAKRITI CHANDERVANSHI FOR THE CARAVAN

Sample Space

A dance group aims to bridge Afrobeats and Bollywood / **Arts**

BHAVYA VASRAM

ABOVE: Founded by the Tanzania-born dancer Aakash Phulwani in 2018, AfroDesi combines Afrobeats with Bollywood to create a unique genre.

/ **SHAISTHA KHAN**

While scrolling through dance videos on Instagram and TikTok, one is likely to find some rendition of the *gwara gwara*—an Afrobeats dance step. Featuring a synchronous swing of the shoulder and knee, the move was first created by the South African artist DJ Bongz and popularised by Rihanna's performance at the 2018 Grammy Awards and Childish Gambino's music video for "This is America." In January this year, AfroDesi, an Indian dance group, collaborated with The Rabbit Dancing Crew, from Ghana, to perform the gwara gwara to a medley of "Afghan Jalebi," a song from the 2019 Bollywood film *Phantom*, and "Lifuende," a song by the Ivorian musician Serge Beynaud.

Founded by the Tanzania-born dancer Aakash Phulwani in 2018, AfroDesi combines Afrobeats with Bollywood to create a unique genre. It runs dance classes in Mumbai, London, Dubai and Dar es Salaam. With cultural literacy—educating dancers on where the moves originate, who created them and what their influences were—at the forefront of its creative process, the group offers people an opportunity to expand their horizons.

Afrobeats is a loose term for contemporary West African pop music, and the style builds on the legacy of the Afrobeat genre. Pioneered by the Nigerian musician and political activist Fela Kuti in the late 1960s, Afrobeat is a fusion of jazz and music from sub-Saharan Africa that was born out of Kuti's activism, including his call for pan-African unity.

The Nigerian filmmaker Ayo Shonaiya, who produced the documentary *Afrobeats: The Backstory*, told me that Afrobeat is characterised by a rhythmic, call-and-response style that is heavy on percussion. "On the other hand, Afrobeats is a combination of everything in Afrobeat, plus hip-hop, rap, R&B, Jamaican Dancehall and pretty much any genre that can fit into the beat pattern," he said. Afrobeats began gaining popularity after "Oliver Twist," by the Nigerian artist D'banj, ranked second in the UK R&B chart in 2012, and Wizkid, another Nigerian artist, collaborated with the Canadian rapper Drake to produce the song "Ojuelegba" in 2014. In an interview last year, the Nigerian-American artist David Adekele—known as the "King of Afrobeats"—referred to Afrobeats as "our new oil."

"When I lived in America, being African wasn't cool," Adekele, who performs under the stage name Davido, told the *Red Bulletin*, a lifestyle magazine. "The first thing you'd hear about Africa is scams and poverty. Now, people talk about the culture, the food. Now everybody wants to make African music."

Yusuph Frank, a co-founder of the Rabbit Dancing Crew, told me that such collaborations with AfroDesi are a good opportunity to showcase the talent of Africa, and that he hopes both industries can work together to reach greater heights.

At the outset, Afrobeats dance or Afrodance and Bollywood may seem like two very different genres. However, Phulwani told me, there are many similarities between the two. "Both are freestyle, without too much emphasis on the technique of dance," he said. "Facial expressions are an important part of both the styles. And lastly, both are just about vibing off each other and having fun!"

For 28-year-old Phulwani, AfroDesi is also a way to bridge his Indian and African identities. Having grown up in Tanzania, he moved to the United States, in 2013, to pursue an engineering degree. There, he realised that, outside of stereotypes, people did not know much about African culture.

He also could not find anything that connected him to home. As a way to meet Africans on his campus, Phulwani started a dance group called African Renaissance. After he graduated, in 2017, a team member suggested that Phulwani merge his dance specialities of Bollywood and Afrobeats to offer something new. The following year, the troupe decided to test it out by hosting a small session in New York.

"Word got out," Phulwani said. "People saw our videos and were really vibing to our style of dance and music." Since then, the group has run sold-out classes across global cities. Outside of workshops, Phulwani and his crew are also making strides in mainstream entertainment. Phulwani and his AfroDesi choreography were recently featured in the Sri Lankan-British singer Arjun Coomaraswamy's music video for "Ding Daga Dong."

"For many others like me," Phulwani said, referring to the Indian diaspora in East Africa, "the concept of Africa hits home. We merged these two cultures to create an art form that everyone can like and appreciate." The group's creative process also involves bridging the gap between African and South Asian communities. "I never saw anyone from the South Asian community in Afrodance classes, and viceversa," he added. "So with all our collaborations, we always push to have a room full of people from both communities to raise awareness about different styles."

Elton D'Souza, a hip-hop dancer who was introduced to Afrodance through an AfroDesi session in Mumbai, found this dance form to be a natural transition from hip-hop. "With my background, it just seemed interesting," he told me. "I started noticing, reading and learning about the history and influence of Afrobeats and Afrodance. Now, Afrobeats is a lot of the music that I listen to." D'Souza also noted that, with African styles and choreographies trending across social media, Bollywood and popular culture are quick to pick up on these trends, sometimes even appropriating or distorting these dance forms.

AfroDesi believes that appreciation for the art and cultural literacy is key to maintaining authenticity. For instance, D'Souza told me how the *azonto*, with its basic knee bends and hand movements, is a dance step that mimics everyday Ghanaian life but is also emblematic of national identity and diaspora pride. "People adopt whatever is trending," he said. "I don't think merely seeing African dance forms is enough, unless they make an effort to learn and understand. Education does help."

"We are not professional Afrobeats dancers," Phulwani said. "We tell our students about the people we learn from and who we are inspired by. We give them that first step and encourage them to go and do their research."

AfroDesi's attempts to foster cultural literacy and exchange come at a time when Africans continue to face widespread racism in India. "It's crazy, because hip-hop is big in India right now, which is adapting from black culture," Phulwani said. "At the same time, Indian society isn't so quick to accept the people," he added, "so it feels performative." He argued that awareness and education could be the solution. "Our generation is changing and becoming more accepting, but we still have a long way to go."

Phulwani agreed that Afrobeats dance is not big in India right now. "But, in the UK and elsewhere, where we host workshops, we see that gap being diminished—there's more acceptance and courage to step outside of their comfort zone and be around people that they're not familiar with," he said. "We've seen that change happening in our class, so that's big for us. We want our platform to keep doing that and push that narrative forward." ■

Demolition Row

Karachi's double standards over land encroachment / Communities

FAWAD HASAN

/ **FAWAD HASAN**

It was the first working day of the week, and Abid Asghar woke up early to head to his small office in Karachi's central district. This was no ordinary Monday, however. Asghar and his comrades had taken time off from their jobs for a far more important task: preventing thousands of houses from being demolished in Karachi.

"Around 9 am on 21 June, we were making placards for our protest, which was supposed to take place in front of Bilawal House"—the headquarters of the Pakistan Peoples Party, which heads the provincial government in Sindh—"to demand our just rights and fair compensation for the broken houses," Asghar told me. "However, I received a call from someone and got to know that they are going to arrest me soon."

Soon after he left, seven police vans, with at least ten plainclothes intelligence officers and around fifty policemen in uniform, raided the area. "They entered my office," Asghar said, and "seized the banners, posters, all the files containing important data about the demolitions and the

funds of a hundred thousand rupees we had painstakingly collected. All gone in seconds."

Asghar managed to evade the policemen and reach the protest site. Only a handful of protesters had managed to reach Bilawal House, which was heavily guarded by anti-riot policemen. The protesters began chanting slogans against the PPP government, which, they allege, is working with the deep state to steal homes from Karachi's working-class residents. Within five minutes, all the protesters, as well as several journalists, were arrested.

"We realised that Bilawal House was more of a sacred place where we couldn't hold protests," Asghar said. "It was surprising that we were arrested in a jiffy from there but, only a few days back, we had protested in front of the Supreme Court of Pakistan's Karachi registry. So, were the people inside Bilawal House more important than the judiciary sitting inside the apex court?"

In August 2020, Karachi received almost five hundred millimetres of rain—the most for a single month in ninety years—which caused heavy flooding. In order to pre-empt future floods, the Supreme Court directed the National Disaster Management Authority to take over the process of cleaning Karachi's nullahs and remove "all encroachments in and around these nullahs." At least fifty thousand people live along the 27-kilometre Gujjar Nullah, while sixteen thousand live along the 22-kilometre Orangi Nullah.

According to the KBT, nine thousand houses with legal leases were demolished, as were six thousand houses without them. Nine people have died as a result of the demolitions.

The demolitions began in February this year, with heavy machinery being used to bulldoze the homes of working-class people. The anti-encroachment drive is funded by a $100-million loan from the World Bank and carried out by the Frontier Works Organisation and the National Logistics Cell, both offshoots of the Pakistani army. The authorities also decided to construct roads on either side of the nullahs, which was not a part of the initial plans. Residents organised a mass front, the Karachi Bachao Tehreek, to resist the demolitions. According to KBT representatives, nine thousand houses with legal leases were demolished, as were six thousand houses without them. Seven churches and 21 mosques were also knocked down. Nine people have died as a result of the demolitions since they started.

LETTER FROM PAKISTAN

Standing on the rubble of his demolished house this June, 54-year-old Dilawar Hussain told me he had nowhere to go. The rickshaw driver used to live with his extended family in a fifty-square-metre house, which he had bought, in 1991, for four hundred thousand rupees. "Perhaps this is the change the government promised," he said, referring to Prime Minister Imran Khan's campaign slogan "*Rok sako to rok lo, tabdeeli aayi re*"—Stop us if you can, change is coming. The monsoon rains were fast approaching. "We are living under the open sky," Hussain added, holding his grandchild. "We have no plans whatsoever. You need money for that, and I don't have it."

On 21 June, hours after the protesters at Bilawal House were arrested, an elderly man named Dodal killed himself. His relatives told the media that he had been suffering from depression ever since he received news that the Gulshan-e-Mustafa Colony, where he lived, would be demolished as part of the anti-encroachment drive.

OPPOSITE PAGE: Half a kilometre from Aladin Park, where the Karachi Metropolitan Corporation demolished illegally constructed shops, the army has constructed a housing complex, wedding halls and a cinema on land granted to it for an ordinance depot.

Three days later, Himo Ali, a young man living in Liaquatabad, suffered a stroke shortly after demolitions began in his neighbourhood. "I was depressed and tense," he told me. "I had recently invested around five million rupees in my home because the government had legalised the house." The left side of his body had been severely affected by the stroke. He kept hiding his left eye, which had been disfigured, and struggled to speak. "All of this will go away, I know," he said. "Eid-ul-Azha is close, and my mother asks me to think that this is the sacrifice we are going to make this year—the sacrifice of the house we had worked so hard for."

Experts on law and urban planning believe that the Supreme Court went beyond its purview by ordering the demolitions. "One must consider that these people were living there with their families for decades," Akhtar Hussain, a senior Supreme Court advocate, told me. Depriving them of shelter, he said, violated their fundamental right to life, guaranteed under Article 9 of the Pakistani constitution. The Supreme Court, he said, has ruled that the right to life "includes education, healthcare and shelter, as a decent human life cannot be perceived without these necessities."

Hussain said that the Supreme Court should have directed the authorities to provide residents with alternative shelter or adequate compensation before going ahead with the demolitions. He noted that, while directing the Sindh government to demolish structures en-

OPPOSITE PAGE:
Naseer Uddin, a Muhajir from Delhi, has kept all the rent receipts his family received from its properties in Paharganj before Partition.

croaching on the Karachi Circular Railway in May 2019, the court had ordered that affected residents be rehabilitated within a year. "About two years have passed," he added, but "no authority, federal or provincial, has taken any step for their rehabilitation."

Karachi's acute housing crisis dates back to the migration caused by Partition, which more than doubled the city's population. In the 1950s, the government embarked on a plan to construct forty thousand houses for refugees, known as Muhajirs, but the programme was soon abandoned. Further internal migration exacerbated the crisis, as urban-development plans never kept pace with the demand for housing.

Muhammed Toheed, a senior research associate at the think tank Karachi Urban Lab, told me that the last low-income housing society constructed by the Karachi Development Authority was Khuda Ki Basti, opened in 1986. "Earlier, two societies—Surjani Town and Mehran Town—were launched in 1983," he said. "KDA didn't start any big housing scheme for the poor. All in all, we can say that development authorities in Karachi have miserably failed to meet the housing needs of the city."

According to a 2015 study, urban areas in Pakistan have an annual demand of 350,000 new housing units and a supply of only 150,000. "What would the masses do in the absence of planning by the state to provide shelter to the ever-growing population in the city?" Toheed said. "They will settle wherever they will find a place through whatever means they have." Over the years, millions of people have made their homes in informal settlements such as the colonies along Karachi's nullahs—as of 2006, over sixty percent of the city's population lived in *katchi abadis*, as informal subdivisions of occupied government land are known.

Naseer Uddin's house was located in Liaquatabad, where most Muhajirs in Karachi settled after Partition. His house was cut in half to make space for the proposed road along the Gujjar Nullah. "My wife and three sons have nowhere to go now," he told me.

"Lots of Muhajirs say that they left everything, including their properties in India, for Pakistan, but people label them as liars," Naseer said. "I have evidence of every property that my grandfather had in Delhi's Paharganj area. We were the caretakers of Qadam Sharif"—a fourteenth-century tomb complex located next to the New Delhi railway station—"and the houses built around that place were owned by our family. My grandfather sent my father to Pakistan while he stayed in India. I still have all the rent receipts that my family received over the years."

Naseer showed me the documents he had treasured for years. "I used to ask my father why he didn't file for property claims in Pakistan, and he would reply that we sacrificed everything we had there and came to Pakistan and we don't ask for a claim for the sacrifices we made," he said. "However, we all worked hard and, after fifty years of labour, we managed to get this ninety-square-yard home. But that was also snatched away from us. Where do we go now?"

Sixty-two-year-old Nisar Ahmed lived with his wife and daughters in the same area before he was rendered homeless. "I have every single document to prove that my house was legal and never encroached over the nullah," he told me. He said that he had filed several cases in the high court to prevent the demolition of his house and secured favourable verdicts. "But the chief justice did not think twice before ordering the authorities to bulldoze our homes," he added, showing me a 1984 map illustrating the real width of the Gujjar Nullah, which the government claims has been narrowed by "illegal houses." The map showed that the nullah's width had not changed over the years; the clogging during the monsoons was caused not because of encroachment, but because the authorities did not clean it.

Khurram Ali said that, through the demolitions, the state keeps pushing the poor to the peripheries of the city after they have invested in the land to increase its value.

"This is an anti-poor drive to target Muhajirs, those who speak Urdu, because we don't have any power in the city administration," Ahmed said. "Did we make sacrifices in India to witness this today?"

Khurram Ali, the convenor of the KBT, called the demolitions a neoliberal phenomenon, in which the state keeps pushing the poor to the peripheries of the city after they have invested in the land to increase its value. "In coming years, no working-class people will be able to afford living in the city if they don't resist against these plans funded by imperialist powers such as the World Bank," he told me.

He said that the Supreme Court's order suggests to the people that only the poor are subject to the law, while state institutions and their officials can keep grabbing land wherever they want. "There are various chunks of land in Karachi's most famous areas, such as Shahrah-e-Faisal and near Kala Pul, where the military has occupied land of different institutions," he said. "A part of the Defence Housing Society is built on Karachi's mangroves, but no one bats an eye there."

A few hundred metres from the KBT office that was raided on 21 June, the Sindh Rangers—a

paramilitary force based in Karachi—have occupied three acres on which a public school once stood. For almost a decade, the park inside this plot has been a no-go area for civilians. Even as the Supreme Court has passed several orders directing the demolition of shops constructed in amenity plots, it has not acted against military land grabs.

Not far from this area is another plot, almost fifteen acres in size, that has also been occupied by the Rangers. According to Shehri, a citizen initiative to protect Karachi's lived environment, as of 2011 the occupied site housed flats, an officers' mess and a school. Today, it also includes a popular wedding hall called Rangers Club.

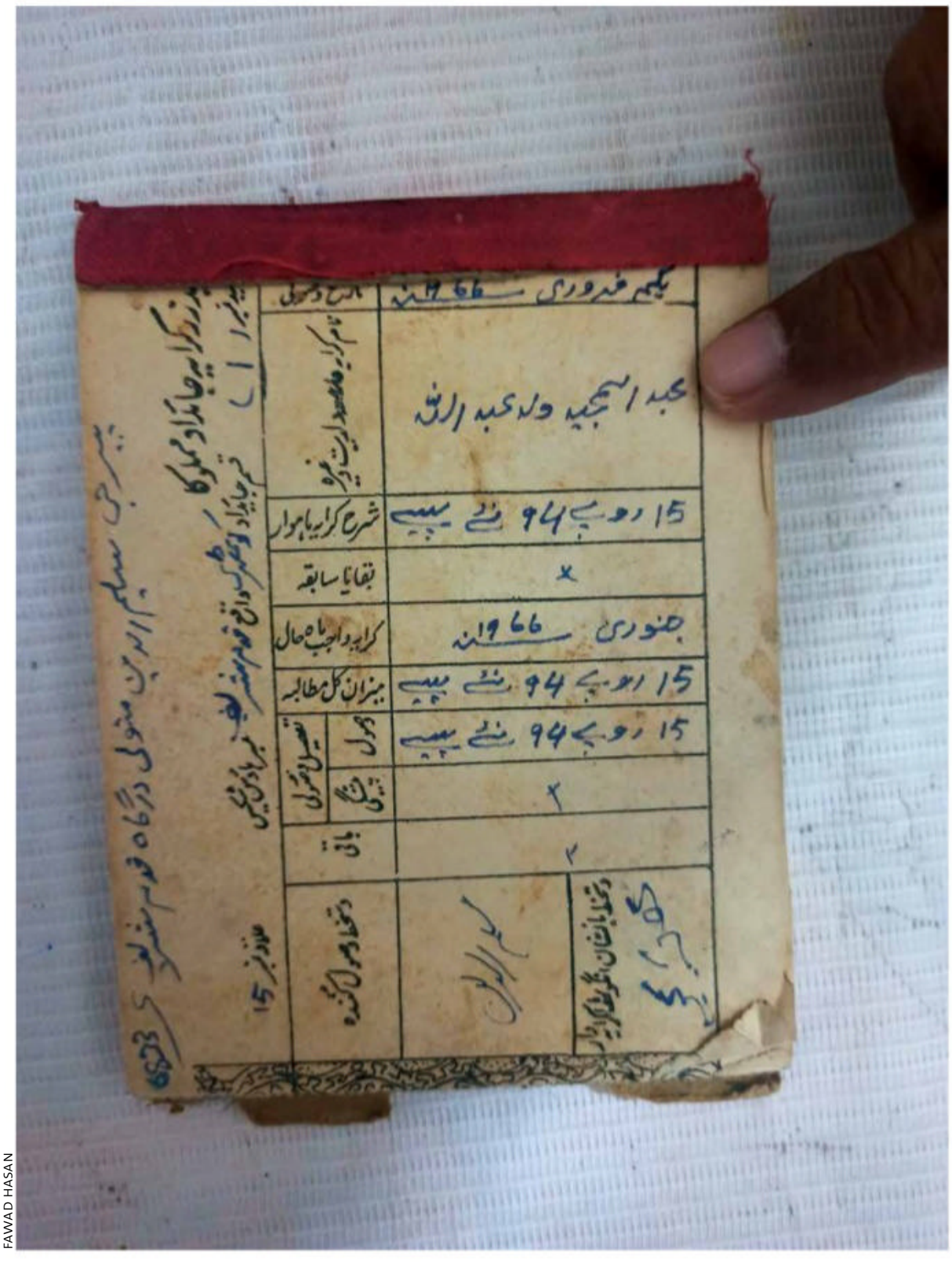
At Aladin Park, the Karachi Metropolitan Corporation demolished an illegally constructed shopping mall in June on the orders of the Supreme Court, causing several middle-class shop owners to lose their source of livelihood. Half a kilometre from it, the army has constructed a housing complex that also includes wedding halls and a cinema, on land granted to it to construct the Central Ordinance Depot. A petition was filed in the Sindh High Court, in 2009, over the misuse of land meant wholly for defence purposes. Khawaja Shams-ul-Islam, who is representing the plaintiff, told me that, even though the court has forbidden any construction on the plot and a court-appointed observer reported in 2016 that private land had been encroached on, the officers controlling the land have not budged. Instead, they are planning to construct more apartments on it.

"The fact is that now the military has got a handle in every institution," the political scientist Ayesha Siddiqa—whose book *Military Inc.* examines the military's various business enterprises—told me. "The ISI"—Pakistan's intelligence agency—"has used its machinery to blackmail every person in responsibility who might try to act against them legally. When a son of a sitting judge of the Sindh High Court can be kidnapped by them, then why wouldn't everyone be silent instead?" She noted that the current chief justice of Pakistan, Gulzar Ahmed, "did give a few statements about the army's encroachment, but no one can now order action against them."

Siddiqa added that the military has "created an atmosphere where, if one speaks against the army, it's considered speaking against the country. That's because of the sheer rhetoric of nationalism that has crept into our society."

On 1 July, the Sindh government finally buckled under the pressure of the KBT and other civil-society organisations, and announced that it would provide plots of 80 square yards each to those who had lost their houses during the anti-encroachment drive. However, KBT activists saw this as mere eyewash, as the government had made the announcement without talking to those affected by the demolitions. "People who have lost their homes should have been considered the stakeholders in this case, but the chief minister announced that there will be a commission to work on the rehabilitation plan and failed to include people from Gujjar and Orangi Nullah in that commission," Ali told me. "They are only buying time and have no interest whatsoever in compensating the people."

Asghar, meanwhile, argued that the plots being offered would not compensate for their losses. "Some people had two-hundred-square-yard houses built along the Gujjar Nullah, where twenty to twenty-five people were living," he said. "Is it fair to give them a small plot—that too without providing them the amount to build it all over again?" ■



FAWAD HASAN

JGU
INDIA'S 1ST MULTIDISCIPLINARY GLOBAL UNIVERSITY

EXPLORE
Our Wide Range of Interdisciplinary Degree Programmes

LAW
- BA/BBA/B.Com. LL.B. (Hons.)
- BA (Hons.) Legal Studies
- LL.B.
- LL.M.

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS
- BA (Hons.) Global Affairs
- BA (Hons.) Political Science
- MA (Diplomacy, Law & Business)

BUSINESS
- BBA (Hons.)
- BBA (Hons.) Business Analytics
- BBA (Hons.) Financial Markets
- BBA (Hons.) Family Business
- Integrated BBA (Hons.) + MBA
- MBA

PUBLIC POLICY
- BA (Hons.) Economics
- BA (Hons.) Social Science & Policy
- MA Public Policy
- MA Economics

JGU @ A GLANCE

6650 Students

832 Faculty

1:8 Faculty-Student Ratio

50% Students on Scholarships

O.P. JINDAL GLOBAL
INSTITUTION OF EMINENCE DEEMED TO BE
UNIVERSITY
A Private University Promoting Public Service

TOP 700 UNIVERSITIES GLOBALLY

RANKED NO.1 PRIVATE UNIVERSITY IN INDIA

INDIA'S NO.1 UNIVERSITY IN SOCIAL SCIENCES, ARTS & HUMANITIES

TOP 150 UNDER 50 GLOBALLY

By QS WORLD UNIVERSITY RANKINGS 2021 Edition

O.P. Jindal Global University, Sonipat Narela Road, Sonipat-131001, (Delhi NCR), Haryana

JGU - An Initiative of Jindal Steel & Power Foundation

LIBERAL ARTS
- BA (Hons.) Liberal Arts & Humanities
- Bachelor of Fine Arts (Hons.)
- PG Diploma in Research & Innovation (JFP)

ARCHITECTURE
- Bachelor of Architecture (B. Arch.)
- BA (Hons.) Built Environment Studies
- Bachelor of Design (B. Des.) - Interior
- Bachelor of Design (B. Des.) - Urban
- Bachelor of Design (B. Des.) - Community

JOURNALISM
- BA (Hons.) Journalism & Media Studies

BANKING & FINANCE
- B.Com. (Hons.)
- BA (Hons.) Finance & Entrepreneurship

ENVIRONMENT
- BA (Hons.) Environmental Studies

PSYCHOLOGY
- BA (Hons.) Psychology

45%
Faculty are alumni of Top **200** Global Universities

4000
Alumni Network World-wide

300+
Collaborations with World's Leading Universities

11%
International Faculty from **37** Countries

55+
Interdisciplinary Research Centres

RANKED 76th LAW SCHOOL IN THE WORLD
By QS WORLD UNIVERSITY RANKINGS SUBJECT RANKINGS | 2021

DIAMOND UNIVERSITY RATING
By QS I-GAUGE

2021 ADMISSIONS OPEN

www.jgu.edu.in

Scan the QR code to visit admission page

PERSPECTIVES

In Pieces

The Naga peace process faces another collapse / **Politics**

/ **KUMAR SANJAY SINGH**

After many twists and turns, efforts to reignite the Naga peace process are once again underway. On 11 June, the Nagaland government issued a notification declaring the constitution of a parliamentary committee—including all 60 members of the state assembly and the state's two MPs—tasked with playing the role of a facilitator in the thorny, decades-old negotiations. At their first meeting in Dimapur, in July, members of the core committee appealed to Naga rebel groups and the centre to "resume Peace Talks" by "setting aside pre-conditions" with the aim of finding "a political solution at earliest time possible." One of the core contentions has been the demand for a separate Naga flag and constitution, led largely by the National Socialist Council of Nagalim (Isak-Muivah). The NSCN(I-M), one of the largest groups in the negotiations, fought the Indian government in an attempt to establish a sovereign state until a ceasefire was announced in 1997.

Six years ago, in August 2015, Narendra Modi boasted about the signing of a "historic" peace agreement with the NSCN(I-M), calling it a sign of mutual "equality and respect, trust and confidence." Relations, however, soon began to nosedive. They deteriorated especially with the centre's appointment of RN Ravi as governor, in July 2019, and have been characterised by increasing distrust. More recently, it has been reported that the list of targets for surveillance using the Pegasus spyware included NSCN(I-M) leaders. Their numbers were added to the list in 2017, two years after Modi spoke of trust, and also in 2019. Under the Modi government, the Naga conflict has acquired new dimensions.

The peace process has survived several governments and has been subject to several resolutions. However, the current phase is marked by more subterfuge than seen before. For one, unlike any other past accord, the content of the 2015 agreement, called the "Framework Agreement," was kept secret until the NSCN(I-M) decided to make it public when it accused Ravi of doctoring the original agreement.

The divergence between the expectations of the NSCN(I-M) and those of the representative of the Indian government became unbridgeable when Ravi, in a gubernatorial address in December 2020, ruled out the demand of a separate Naga flag and constitution. In a media interview less than two months earlier, Thuingaleng Muivah, the head of the NSCN(I-M), had unequivocally refused to sign an agreement if these precise demands were not met. Earlier in the year, Muivah had written in a letter to Modi that "to save the political dialogue, the talks should resume at the Prime Minister's level, without pre-condition and outside India in a third country." (The letter was released to the press in October 2020, some months after it was sent, when the prime minister failed to respond.) In the face of stasis, this was Muivah's attempt to reboot the peace process. For its part, the centre has attempted to expedite the process by suddenly bringing other Naga political

PTI

RIGHT: Prime Minister Narendra Modi with NSCN (IM) general secretary Thuingaleng Muivah and others, including Rajnath Singh and Ajit Doval, at the signing ceremony of the 2015 Naga peace accord. Relations have deteriorated significantly in the past years.

groups into the peace negotiations and involving a core committee of political representatives as a facilitator, but these are not steps that will achieve a lasting peace. Instead, these attempts have only resulted in the hardening of stands.

This BJP-led central government's intransigency is ideological, derived from the concept of an indivisible sovereignty. Nagaland is neither the first nor the only region of India to demand a separate flag. Jammu and Kashmir had one until it was recently withdrawn, and Tamil Nadu proposed a separate flag in 1970. Karnataka made a similar proposal in 2018, which was withdrawn in August 2019, after the BJP came to power in the state. These demands are not a challenge to the Indian Constitution. Several legal authorities have relied on the *SR Bommai vs Union of India* judgment from 1994 to state that there is no prohibition in the Constitution for a state to have its own flag.

In the meantime, the mainstream media has been working to create public opinion in favour of the early implementation of a Naga peace agreement—despite the deadlock over the flag and constitution. A recent news report quoted government sources to claim that rampant corruption in the NSCN(I-M) and Muivah's chokehold over it were resulting in increased disillusionment within the organisation, and that this might lead some of its functionaries to desert. This is a time-tested tactic of Indian governments: weaponising tribalism to sow discord among Naga organisations.

The country's fractious relationship with Naga tribes has fuelled the longest conflict in modern India. On 15 August 1947, when India claimed its place amongst the community of free nations, the task of moulding a country into a nation remained. The transfer of power from the British left a series of issue unresolved, such as the future of the princely states and the colonial possessions of Portugal and France. Also deferred was a resolution to the Naga tribes' reluctance to accept a place in India on the conditions offered by New Delhi. The Naga insurgency gathered steam in the 1950s, and persisted. Against this backdrop, the Naga peace process, initiated in 1995 when Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao met the NSCN(I-M) leadership in Paris, has the potential to become historically momentous. Instead, it is threatening to dissipate into nothingness. The time and commitment invested in pursuing peace over two and a half decades risks being frittered away.

In a 1958 parliamentary debate over the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, the home minister at the time, GB Pant, said that Naga militants "are indulging in arson, murder, loot, dacoity, etc." So, Pant stated, "it has become necessary to adopt effective measures ... to enable the armed forces to handle the situation effectively, wherever such problems arise hereafter, it has been considered necessary to introduce this bill." Depicting Naga organisations seeking self-determination as trigger-happy deviants creating law-and-order problems became the template for dominant discourse on the Naga movement. Similar movements broke out across the northeast in the wake of Indo-Naga hostility, but the Naga movement was depicted as the putative mother of all insurgencies.

And yet, Nagaland's insurgent groups have repeatedly exhibited a readiness to enter negotiations. Each bout of talks, however, has ultimately resulted in the whittling down of the Nagas' political rights. In June 1947, the Indian government and the Naga National Council—formed to negotiate terms as British rule came to an end—formulated the Naga-Akbar Hydari Accord. The nine-point agreement recognised the "right of the Nagas to develop themselves according to their freely expressed wishes." It laid out the various executive, legislative and judicial controls the NNC would be able to exercise and expressed the desire to "bring under one administrative unit as far as possible all Nagas." While this provided some autonomy, it did not meet the Naga political demand for independence. Eventually, troops were deployed in Naga areas in 1955 to quell a militant movement demanding full sovereignty.

The 16-point agreement between the government and the Naga People's Convention, signed in July 1960, was the basis on which Nagaland was granted statehood three years later. It significantly impacted the social and political topography of the region. By insisting that the signatories of the agreement would only be from the NPC—and not the NNC, which was the body that had earlier led the call for Naga independence—the accord created a schism between Naga political forces that had constitutional sanction and an underground military movement asking for separation. According to the agreement, a governor for Nagaland would be appointed by the president of India and would be vested with executive powers. The governor would also have "special responsibility with regard to law and order during transitional period and for so long as the law and order situation continue to remain disturbed on account of hostile activities." In 1962, the thirteenth amendment incorporated provisions of the accord into the Indian Constitution, as Article 371A, and Nagaland was granted statehood on 1 December 1963.

With the creation of Nagaland, the Nagas were divided administratively across four states. The bulk of them lived within the new state's borders, but significant numbers now find themselves in the neighbouring states of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh and Manipur. The accord was preceded and followed by a pacification programme along tribal and regional lines. Sectarian conflict became central to achieving political goals. The rivalry in the ranks of the NNC reached a flash point after Kaito Sukhai, who led the NNC's armed wing, was killed, leading to a series of further killings based on tribal affiliations. These divisions fragmented the support for the NNC and eroded its legitimacy, but they also ensured that the benefits from the creation of Nagaland did not percolate to the Naga tribes outside its borders.

More negotiations over the next decade culminated in the Shillong Accord of 1975. It stated that various insurgent groups "conveyed their decision, of their own volition, to accept, without condition, the Constitution of India," and also spoke of them surrendering

arms and working towards a "final settlement." Consequently, the centre of gravity of the Naga movement shifted out of Nagaland, to the territories occupied by disgruntled Nagas living outside the state. The NSCN was founded in 1980 under the leadership of Muivah, Isak Swu and SS Khaplang, who continued armed resistance.

Despite this complex history, the political discourse around peace talks tends to insist on an asymmetrical structure of accountability. Government agencies and state functionaries are not subject to the same amount of scrutiny as northeastern groups when it comes to the failure of peace efforts. And so, these agreements are seen as being purely in the interest of the government and the negotiating team of bureaucrats, rather than an essential concern of the public that will bear the consequences of any fallout. This is perhaps why establishing peace in the northeast is seldom accorded a place of prominence in the manifesto of any national party. Until public opinion is invested in the peace process, it will always be prey to tactical manoeuvres, often by short-sighted and self-serving state representatives.

With the ceasefire in 1997, the ongoing Naga talks have lasted for a period of over two and a half decades. The talks aim at initiating a processes to extend rights of political settlement to Naga tribes outside Nagaland. The Framework Agreement delineates two levels of negotiation. The first deals with ideological issues of shared sovereignty between two entities, including the fraught question of a separate flag and constitution. The second deals with "competencies," or the demarcation of rights and jurisdictions of the central and Naga institutions of governance and administration, including special administrative arrangements for Naga-inhabited areas outside Nagaland. All of these are structured by past accords. Even as the Framework Agreement is a significant attempt to evade the limits imposed by the 16-point agreement, its objective of evolving a special administrative arrangement for Naga-inhabited areas outside Nagaland may run into the rigid limits of the older arrangement.

Incorporating the 16-point agreement into the Indian Constitution as Article 371A paved the way for restructuring the political topography of a large part of the north-eastern region. Along the lines of Article 371A, Assam now has Article 371B, Manipur Article 371C, Sikkim Article 371F, Mizoram Article 371G and Arunachal Pradesh Article 371H. The administrative arrangements emerging out of these were grafted upon the pre-existing arrangement of inner-line permits—notified under the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulations, 1873—which were designed to protect British commercial interests in Assam as well as strategically significant land routes to Burma and China. This tying down of ethnic communities to designated territories has resulted in the ethnicisation of the landscape.

The decision to overlay the instrumentalities of Article 371 upon the colonial regime of inner-line permits explains simultaneously the visceral response to suggestions for redrawing administrative units in the northeast as well as the persistent demands of different regional ethnicities for a dedicated homeland. This underlies endemic ethnic antagonisms, such as the Naga–Kuki conflict or the clashing territorial claims in Manipur between Nagas and Meiteis. It also explains why boundary disputes between northeastern states, such as that between Assam and Nagaland or the more recent dispute between Assam and Mizoram, often turn violent. Such potent ethnic conflicts over territory allow central agencies to break the political aspirations of northeastern groups by playing one ethnic claim against another. Evidently, the delineation of the agreed-upon "competencies" in Nagaland's neighbouring states may be confounded by this divide-and-rule policy.

This BJP-led central government's intransigency is ideological, derived from the concept of an indivisible sovereignty. Nagaland is neither the first nor the only region of India to demand a separate flag.

Recent political stirrings in Arunachal Pradesh and Manipur may be early indicators of the turbulence this process could run into. Civil-society groups in both states have registered their objections on several occasions. Further, a news item in August 2020 reported that the Manipur government had denied having any discussion with the central government regarding forming "two autonomous councils [in] Arunachal Pradesh and Manipur under the provisions of the Constitution of India."

Past accords structure every new accord, but they do not mechanically determine its outcome. Each negotiation between political entities has strategic significance and can produce unpredictable outcomes for the peace process. The ongoing Indo-Naga peace accord underscores this eloquently. Two distinct phases can be identified in the current peace process: the first spanning 1995 and August 2015, and the second following June 2019. The period between August 2015 and June 2019 forms a sort of interregnum, in which the

deliberations primarily focussed on working out the various modalities of governance and administration. A separate flag and constitution were to be discussed only after the conclusion of these negotiations.

The first phase, a few hiccups notwithstanding, was marked with strategic positivity and significant progress in the peace process. A joint communiqué was signed in Amsterdam in July 2002, in which the Indian government formally recognised the unique history and situation of the Naga people. It was agreed that talks should continue in an accommodative and forward-looking manner so that a lasting and honourable solution could be arrived at.

A little over a month later, the talks ran into rough weather when Muivah expressed unhappiness over an alleged attempt to fit the joint declaration within the framework of the 16-point agreement. The cause of anxiety was the circulation of a document titled "Proposed Basis for Discussion to Achieve a Comprehensive Solution to the Naga Issue." In 2005, the centre attempted to involve all Naga factions in the talks, which was opposed by the NSCN(I-M). By 2006, the talks failed when a central team, led by Oscar Fernandes, met the NSCN(I-M) leadership in Amsterdam and rejected the demand of a "special federal arrangement" to enable the Nagas to govern themselves.

There was no space for the recognition of the Naga's unique identity in Ajit Doval's understanding of nationalism as a process that melts and merges all identities into one.

A key issue has been the uncertainty and political interference surrounding the appointment and functioning of interlocutors to the Naga talks. Swaraj Kaushal was appointed as the first interlocutor in May 1998, but he developed differences with the prime minister's office as well as with Brajesh Mishra, the national security advisor at the time, and his tenure lasted only until 1999. The former union home secretary K Padmanabhaiah was appointed next. According to him, each of the five home secretaries to whom he had to report held divergent opinions on the Naga conflict. RS Pandey, a former petroleum secretary, was appointed the next interlocutor in February 2010. Pandey suddenly tendered his resignation in December 2013 as the home ministry was unhappy with the direction in which the talks were developing. For a period of almost seven months, a permanent interlocutor was not appointed—Ajit Lal, a former chairperson of the joint intelligence committee, was involved in the negotiations as special director. In August 2014, the prime minister's office overruled the home ministry's recommendation to elevate Lal as the centre's interlocutor and instead appointed RN Ravi.

The Framework Agreement further built upon the understanding reached in the Amsterdam declaration. The goodwill generated by the signing of these documents sustained the peace process through the various crises detailed above. It also resulted in softening protocols on some key issues. The Indo-Naga talks began as a process that was to be conducted at the highest levels, between the prime minister and the NSCN(I-M) leadership, in a location outside India and without any conditionality—a euphemism meant to indicate that the talks did not have to hew to the framework of the Indian Constitution. However, after 2010, there has been a gradual downgrading of these provision: the talks were conducted by an official of the home ministry, the location shifted to Delhi and the government rejected the demand of integrating Nagas under one administrative unit.

The second phase of the Naga talks began with the re-appointment of Ajit Doval as the national security adviser, in May 2019. His tenure in the role was made co-terminus with Modi's term as prime minister, and he was also assigned the rank of a cabinet minister. Doval has been advocating the concepts of one law across the country and indivisible sovereignty, and is a vocal critic of what he terms "diluted sovereignty"—special administrative arrangements inherited from colonial rule and the special status granted to certain territories, as in Jammu and Kashmir until the revocation of Article 370 in 2019. In his speech at an event organised by Vivekanand International Foundation in September 2018, Doval stated that the continued existence of the constitution of Jammu and Kashmir was an aberration.

The concept of indivisible sovereignty has had a chilling effect on the Naga talks, which were founded on hopes of "shared sovereignty" and special administrative arrangements for Nagas outside of Nagaland. There was no space for the recognition of the Naga's unique identity in Doval's understanding of nationalism as a process that melts and merges all identities into one.

Where the Naga talks go from here is anybody's guess. It depends on the tactical play between the attempt to reboot the peace process by the NSCN(I-M) and the government's attempt to push ahead the peace process without agreeing to a separate Naga constitution and flag. ■

Failing the Grade

The Kalinga Institute of Social Sciences' approach to tribal people makes it no place for an anthropological conference / **Education**

/ **VIRGINIUS XAXA**

Last August, the International Union of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences announced that it was withdrawing a plan to hold the next World Anthropology Congress, scheduled for 2023, at the Kalinga Institute of Social Sciences in Bhubaneshwar. This came after many tribal and non-tribal researchers, teachers, university students and activists working on tribal rights voiced strong reservations about the IUAES's choice of venue, and the organisation's executive committee noted in announcing the decision that it had acted in "deference to the many anthropologists from within India and across the globe who have expressed their opinion on the matter." The IUAES, in collaboration with the Indian Anthropological Association, has since shifted the venue to Delhi.

A contingent of Indian anthropologists and anthropological associations—including the Indian Anthropological Society and others, claiming to represent more than two thousand anthropologists—came out in opposition to the decision and issued a joint statement asking that KISS be reinstated as the host. The IUAES has not budged, but a faction of the dissenters now proposes to run a parallel congress at KISS anyway. The institute has hosted many national and international conferences and seminars in the past, but the reasons to resist its hosting of the World Anthropology Congress are plain to see. The stubborn insistence on holding a conference at KISS exposes a wilful and unfortunate blindness to these reasons among a sizeable section of Indian anthropologists.

Anthropology in India and the world over has traditionally been associated with the study of tribes, whom the discipline initially defined in terms of their supposed savageness. Anthropology has tried hard to move beyond this. Since the 1940s, it has gradually shifted away from the study of tribes to that of peasant societies. In India, however, the study of tribes continues to be the dominant concern, and the old conception of tribes still lingers among many practitioners. Like the discipline of anthropology, KISS too has made tribes and their education its exclusive concern. Founded as a tribal residential school in 1993 and run by a foundation, it now proudly claims to be the "world's largest residential education institution for tribal children." By its own numbers, the institute now houses 27,125 children at its Bhubaneshwar campus, which includes a school and a college, and has 20,000 children enrolled at satellite centres in ten so-called "tribal" districts of Odisha. Tribal children are provided free education up to the tenth standard, which can extend to the postgraduate level as well, and this is combined with vocational education in different trades from the sixth to the tenth standard. KISS's stated mission is "to break the vicious cycle of poverty and social isolation" of its students, which in practice it sees as involving their removal from their families and communities, in the belief that everyone can "live and develop with dignity" and "become an active and contributing member of our society." The objection to KISS owes to the disconcerting agenda it stands for and promotes—an agenda rooted in a conception of tribal people shared and reinforced by outdated ideas of anthropology—and the impact of the underlying notions on tribal children.

Tribes in India have for long been described and treated as savages. To run an educational institution today with a civilising mission based on this implicit premise is deeply disturbing—a throwback to the goals and methods of the colonial state and Christian missionaries in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. KISS has called tribes primitive and backward in several of its magazines and annual reports. One of the organisation's promotional videos states that "they fill up their stomach with forest products and cover their bodies with leaves of plants"—a blatantly false picture of the current lives of the tribes KISS is trying to serve.

Tribes in India are not at the stage they were at in the colonial period or the early post-Independence era, even though they continue to suffer poverty and marginalisation. Despite all odds, a fairly well-educated class has emerged and grown within tribal communities. Tribal people have for far too long been silent spectators unable to defend themselves, but this emergent class, especially, is no longer prepared to tolerate false conceptions of tribal life or warped agendas for their future. This is reflective of a worldwide trend, as reflected in the adoption of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples by the United Nations in 2007. The document affirms that "indigenous peoples are equal to all other peoples" and recognises "the right of all peoples to be different, to consider themselves different, and to be respected as such." KISS's foundational principles are antithetical to this conception.

The idea that tribal people are uncivilised, and that KISS is civilising them, has been continuously driven into the minds of its students by the institute's teachers and staff, as well as its founder, Achyuta Samanta, a philanthropist and current member of parliament from the Biju Janata Dal. When KISS students are asked what contribution the institution has made to their lives, the typical answer is that it has civilised them. Their self-esteem as tribal people is undermined tremendously, and the damage can linger for life. Children are led to believe that they have no future without KISS and its founder, and that they should therefore be forever grateful to both. In its everyday habits, the place communicates to them a low sense of individual self-worth—when dignitaries visit KISS, for in-

stance, students are compelled to stand en masse for hours to welcome them. During the last parliamentary election, children were used to canvas for Samanta in the constituency he contested, where tribal people form a significant part of the population.

Reflecting its prejudiced view of tribes, KISS does not make adequate room in its teaching and administrative staff for capable tribal people. This is true even at the lowest levels, except for a few individuals—particularly language teachers in the elementary classes. The ideology of KISS is evidently not to create an egalitarian, inclusive and just society, but rather to reinforce within the institution the paternal and hierarchical structures prevalent in society today.

Access to schools is a crucial factor in this context. A high share of the tribal population in Odisha, like elsewhere, lives in remote forested or hilly areas where accessing schools poses major difficulties. The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009, compels state governments to maintain a primary school within one kilometre of any habitation, and an upper-primary school within three kilometres. The Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan specifies that there must be a secondary school within five kilometres of any habitation. These stipulations are routinely ignored, and the growth of KISS residential schools has only made things worse. The systematic enrolment of tribal children in them has fuelled declining enrolment in village schools, and government officials often use this as a pretext to close them down. In Odisha, 475 primary and 13 upper-primary schools were closed down in 2019–20 alone. The state planned to shut 6,340 schools with fewer than twenty students and 5,177 schools with fewer than forty students in 2020. More and more, tribal children are being forced to enter KISS for lack of choice.

Over the course of almost three decades of working with tribal children, KISS has had ample opportunity to create a pioneering curriculum for them, one that not only accommodates their languages, cultures, histories and traditions but also embraces innovative pedagogical ideas. Instead, KISS has continued with the kind of curriculum common across the country, developed to fulfil the sub-national aspirations of the dominant linguistic communities that have driven the creation of many of India's states. Such aspirations grew side by side with Indian nationalism under colonial rule but became most pronounced after Independence. There were similar articulations among many tribes or groups of tribes, but their demands were hardly given any consideration. Rather, they were fragmented, divided between various newly created states, as these states vied with each other for the lands the tribes inhabited and the rich natural and mineral resources that came with them. Educational curricula were developed around the language, culture, traditions, histories and values of each state's dominant sub-national community, and tribal people had no alternative but to accept a kind of education that was alien to them.

Such a system of education has meant poor enrolment, non-attendance, educational stagnation and high dropout rates among tribal schoolchildren. It has also led to the extinction of many tribal languages and left many more on the verge of disappearing. The multitude of tribal languages in Odisha, which is home to 62 distinct tribal communities, are broadly grouped into 38 languages, 19 of which are nearly extinct.

In India, the study of tribes continues to be the dominant concern of anthropology, and the old conception of tribal people as savages still lingers. Like anthropology, KISS too has made tribes and their education its exclusive concern.

KISS, as a residential institution, is especially complicit in the decline of tribal languages. It takes children away from their families, villages and communities, which are essential to transmitting and sustaining languages. KISS seems to have adopted mother tongue-based education at elementary levels, but this is meant for the smooth transition from children's mother tongues to the state language—in this case, Odia. Given the number of students at KISS, it is contributing to cultural genocide on a massive scale. And KISS does not stop at language. It also advances a process of Hinduisation—that is, of detaching students from the beliefs and practices of their traditional religion, in favour of Hindu ones. The KISS campus includes a Jagannath temple, and students are encouraged to visit it, pray to the deity and participate in temple rituals.

KISS also plays a role in dispossessing tribal people of their lands and established livelihoods. It has a record of collaboration with numerous corporations that have driven tribes from their homes, often with brutal violence, to clear the way for the exploitation of resources. In other words, KISS is working with the very agents that have caused much of tribal people's impoverishment and plight even as it claims to be pursuing these same people's welfare.

In 2012, KISS partnered with Vedanta to enrol children from villages near one of the corporation's sites of operation, with the stated goal of "mainstreaming of Tribals." As part of this, KISS signed indemnity agreements with the parents of each child, consenting to their study at the institution. Vedanta, in turn, agreed to sponsor a hundred children until they complete the tenth standard, at the rate of ₹20,000 per child per year. Similar agreements have been signed with the Tata Group, which has faced protests from tribal people opposing its operations in Odisha. Tribal activists continue to mark the anniversary of the killing of at least a dozen tribal people in Kalinganagar in 2006, when police fired upon protests against the setting up of a Tata Steel plant in the town. Further, KISS has partnered with the Adani Group, India's largest private thermal-power producer, to open a branch of the institute, called KISS-Adani, in the town of Baripada.

NIHA MASIH / THE WASHINGTON POST / GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE: KISS assembled over 26,000 students in November 2019 to set a Guinness world record for the most people brushing their teeth together. The idea that tribal people are uncivilised, and that KISS is civilising them, is driven into the minds of students at the institution.

The mass displacement of tribal people in India began soon after Independence and became intricately connected with the country's pursuit of economic development. The impoverishment, malnutrition and even starvation of tribal communities dates back to this period. Earlier, such phenomena were rare. Odisha has a large number of public-sector undertakings engaged in building dams, running irrigation and power projects, and extracting mineral resources, not to mention corporate-run projects doing the same. Since economic liberalisation, the government of Odisha has been vigorously promoting mining in the state as a way to attract private capital, and offering a range of subsidies and concessions to corporate investors. These projects contribute to the development of Odisha and its dominant population, but not to the development of the tribes whose lands most of them depend on. The number of people living below the poverty line in Odisha increased from roughly 71 percent in the early 1990s to over 75 percent by 2005. Yet, the founder of the KISS talks of "transforming tribes from tax consumers to taxpayers."

It is unfortunate that the anthropologists and anthropological associations involved in first selecting a venue for the 2023 conference either did not care to discover these facts or chose to turn a blind eye to them. Even more unfortunate is that even the controversy over the venue, which made such facts unavoidable, has failed to stir the minds and hearts of anthropologists in India at large, but for a few. This confirms, once again, the disappointing state of the discipline in the country and its continued historical hangover. Having grown in under the shadow of colonialism, anthropology still fosters among its practitioners a lack of empathy, a cold detachment from their subjects, reminiscent of that bygone era.

The problem manifests itself in many ways. Indian anthropologists have for long decades focussed the overwhelming share of their attention on the study of tribal communities. By comparison, other marginalised social groups such as Dalits and women only attracted comparable academic attention much later in the post-Independence years. Yet the Dalit and women's agendas are today far more prominent in national debate and discourse, while concern for India's tribes is conspicuous by its absence. For anthropologists, it seems the tribal people they work with are mere subjects of study, little more than sources of data and information. Their pain, suffering and humiliation, their imaginations and aspirations, the dispossession of their lands and wealth and cultures, do not matter much. The anthropologists rallying to reinstate KISS as the host of the World Anthropology Congress only show how little they value the people they study. ■

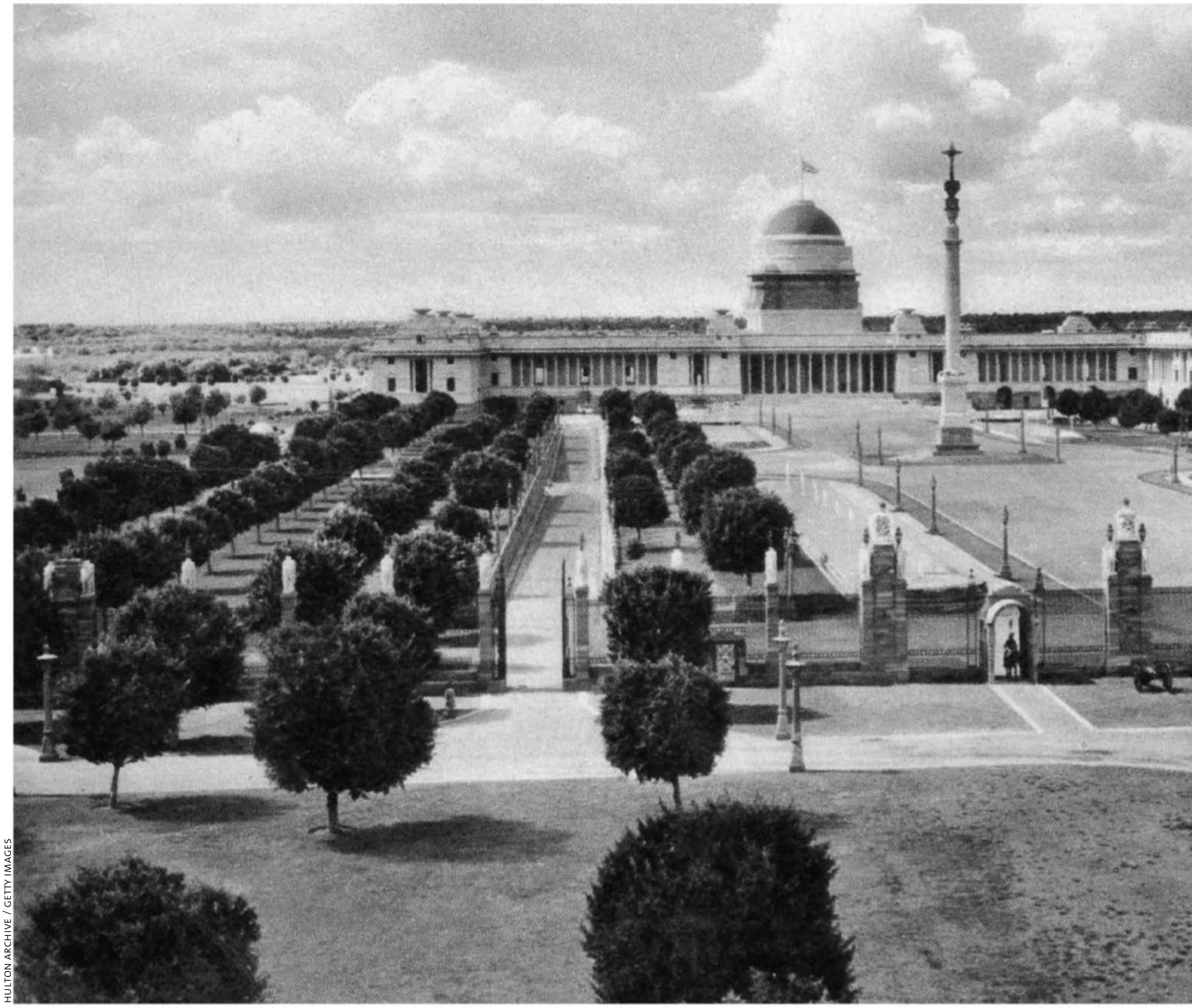
Make Do and Mend

The Central Vista redevelopment reveals the lack of conservation studies and layering in India's history writing / **History**

/ **NAMAN P AHUJA**

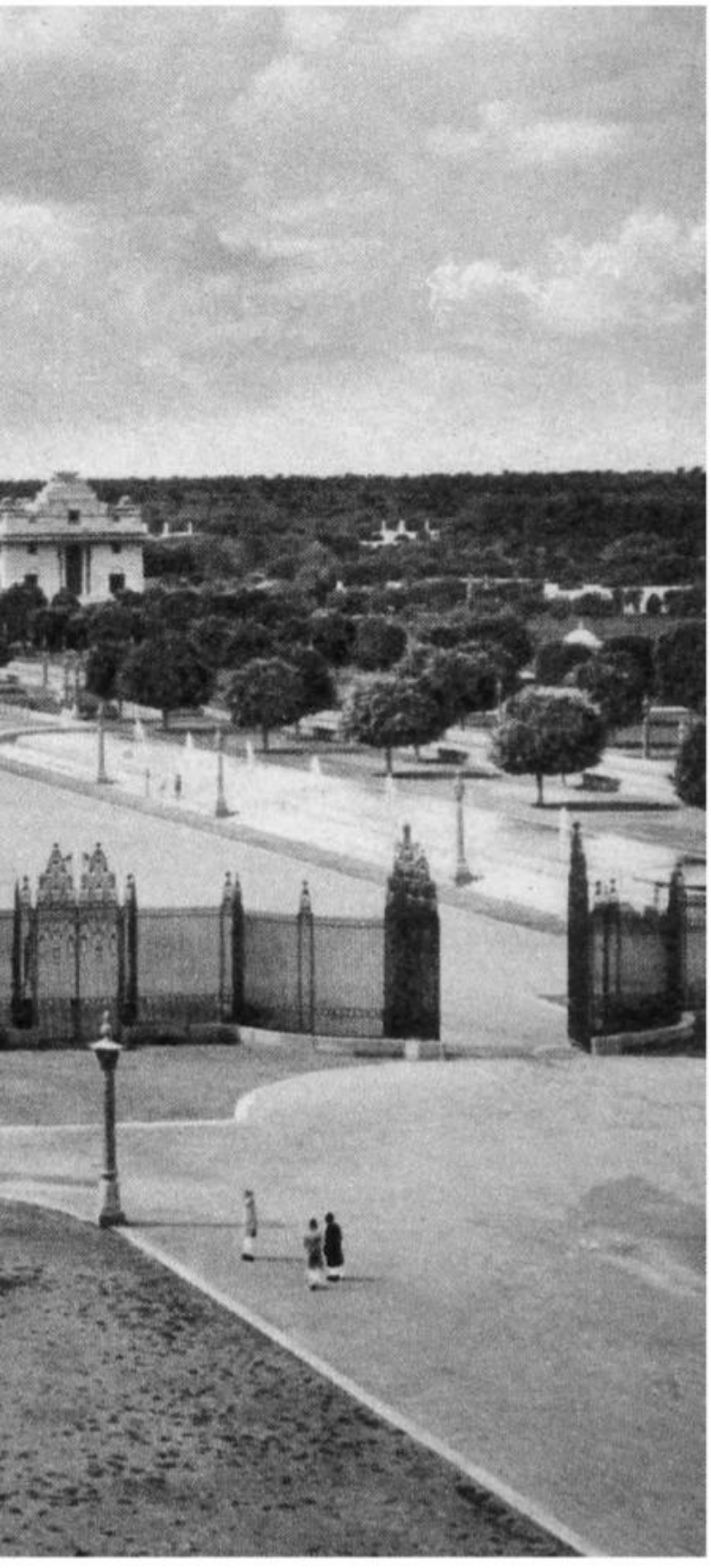
India's sacred literature points to the impermanence of all things, and to renewal and change as part of the natural order, but the very same texts reinforce the idea that renewal and renovation should be attempted before discarding or rebuilding. The Agni Purāṇa clearly states that old and broken idols should be repaired rather than discarded, and only replaced when repair is no longer possible. When studying India's ancient texts, scholars have focussed on *mahakumbhabhishekham*, or consecration ceremonies, including *prāṇa-pratiṣṭhā* and *cakṣu-dāna*—that is, instilling life, and opening the eyes of newly made idols. But both these ceremonies are described in the very same texts alongside *jīrṇoddhāra*—an irrefutably Indian approach to conservation and re-use.

"Jīrṇoddhāra literally means digesting the past, an act of sacralised renovation," writes the art historian Annapurna Garimella, who examined 2,200 inscriptions and dozens of



HULTON ARCHIVE / GETTY IMAGES

temples in the Deccan and peninsular India for her dissertation, titled "Early Vijayanagara Architecture, Style, and State Formation." The buildings of the Vijayanagara Empire, which flourished between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries, were sponsored by rulers who took on a demonstrably respectful attitude toward the Choḷa past through



both appropriation and reinvention. While examining jirṇoddhāra at work in architectural restoration and design transformation, Garimella explains that it is understood "as a form of worship, of revivifying or re-instilling life in what has already been made. The word 'uddhāra' also implies a loan, in the case taken from the past by the present, a legacy especially with regard to primogeniture, and equally, the person's capacity to put forth that past for the future." Numerous texts pre-dating the period of her study also devote attention to such practice. The *Māyamatam*, an eleventh- or twelfth-century South Indian treatise on architecture, devotes an entire chapter to jīrṇoddhāra, while the even older Agni Purāṇa has two chapters with information on the subject.

The paucity of modern studies and writing on this concept, however, has led to a profound misunderstanding of what was important in Indian art and temple worship, as also to a gap in the knowledge of the integral role that conservation and a sense of history have played in Indian culture. Conservation, repair and maintenance have been key to Indian thought. Understanding this allows for a very different imagination than the one prevailing today of what the management of art and architecture can do in the Indian context. That, by extension, opens the door to ways of using historical artefacts and monuments to make public statements through the use of layering, through adopting and transforming the old, rather than through slash-and-burn methods that try to wipe out the past in order to announce one's arrival.

Seven months before the opening of the 2009 G8 summit, the image-conscious Italian prime minister Silvio Berlusconi decided to shift the venue of the deliberations to a new location—the city of L'Aquila, in central Italy, which had been extensively damaged by an earthquake just eight months earlier. Preparations had already been under-

LEFT: Delhi's seats of power were built to glorify India's colonial oppressors. Yet the post-Independence government decided to adapt rather than destroy them, replacing motifs of imperialism with symbols of the Indian republic.

way for two years, at a cost of $287 million, to develop hotels and infrastructure at La Maddalena, a small island off Sardinia, and critics advised Berlusconi not to take such a hasty decision. He, however, deftly turned the matter around: "What location would be more appropriate than a land wounded by the earthquake?" he asked. Berlusconi further said that his government had made a list of 44 damaged sites of artistic value that foreign countries could "adopt" and revive, effectively forcing other G8 leaders to set up collaborations and investments in Italy for this purpose. The crisis was turned into an opportunity. In contrast, as India is preparing to host the G20 summit in 2023 and struggling in the grip of a pandemic, the country's government is using the opportunity to rip out and replace Delhi's iconic Central Vista rather than renovate and repair it.

India still has the opportunity to act on its ancient traditions of jīrṇoddhāra and respect for history. In the sixth chapter of the *Abhinavabhārati*, Abhinavagupta says: "As our intellectual curiosity climbs higher and higher, it becomes possible to see the truth without feeling tiredness, only due to the stairs built by our esteemed predecessors. A rich and fruitful thought can only be made on a foundation that has been prepared by our predecessors." Similarly, the opening of Kalidāsa's *Mālavikā-agnimitram* has a wonderful passage in which the cast asks their manager why they should enact something afresh when this story has been already dealt with poets of established fame, such as Bhāsa, Saumillaka, Kaviputra and others? Kalidāsa responds through the manager, "Everything is not good, because it is old; nor is a poem

BELOW: The British government promoted thriftiness during the Second World War with the slogan "Make do and mend." At no stage, however, did "Make do and mend" imply a decline in fashion or style.

OPPOSITE PAGE: The idea of repair as desirable is not unique to Indian cultures. In the venerable Japanese practice of *kintsugi*, broken ceramics are repaired with precious metals.

to be condemned, because it is new; learned men accept one or the other after careful examination. Man with little intelligence is guided by the opinion of others."

Jīrṇoddhāra was not practised by Hindus alone, and it has not been entirely forgotten in India. Jains in many parts of Gujarat, Rajasthan, Karnataka and other regions still practice the jīrṇoddhāra of many shrines. The presence of the Sanskrit term in inscriptions both at temples and on Islamic monuments shows that Sultanate rulers also became familiar with this approach, which was clearly preferable on many levels to acts of demolition. If jīrṇoddhāra was a widely accepted and constitutive element of culture through such a long period of history, one must ask what brought about the general amnesia that has made it antithetical to the Indian mindset? The question might also be framed to ask: why did respect for history diminish?

WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

Perhaps it was because of how the matter was approached that modern scholarship has inadequately emphasised India's unique ways of living with a sense of history. Colonial scholars asked narrow questions about what makes an object sacred, and their Indian informants answered such questions with reciprocal economy. Both focussed attention on consecration without the qualification that consecration ceremonies may be employed *when* an idol or building needs to be re-sacralised, or *if* and when it is found necessary to make it anew. Consequently, emphasis was always placed on the name of the emperor or other figures who first commissioned a building, even though it was almost invariably renovated or radically altered by someone else centuries later.

The idea of repair as being desirable is not unique to Indian cultures. The old and equally venerable Japanese aesthetic of *kintsugi* or *kintsukuroi* has become extremely fashionable in art circles today. In this practice, broken pots are repaired with precious metals such as gold, silver or platinum. This serves as a reminder that it is the act of repair, of connection, that makes the ordinary precious; it keeps memory alive.

Elsewhere, the *objet trouvé*, or found object, formed an important element of modernism. It was a constitutive element of Dadaism in the 1920s, of Arte Povera in the late 1960s, and even inspired an entire genre called Trash Art. Each of these movements utilised existing materials. Rather than a sign of poverty, this approach is a profoundly sophisticated aesthetic that is now opportune and worthy of a renewed innings.

At times of austerity and hardship, whole governments and societies have often adapted to use that which is available. The British ministry of information began to promote thriftiness during the Second World War with the slogan "Make do and mend." At no stage, however, did "Make do and mend" imply a decline in style or fashion. Even today, recurring trends for elbow patches on jackets, or for darned or patched jeans, attest to the endurance of the fashion of repair.

In "Everyday Use," a 1973 short story by the African-American writer Alice Walker, the protagonist and her sister receive patchwork quilts from their mother. The quilts are laden with symbolism, with memories of the homes the family has lived in over generations, and Walker uses them as a means to reflect on continuity, on little patches of the past carrying forward across generations. Importantly however, while the mother and one sister want the patchwork quilts to be a part of everyday use, the other sister looks on her quilt as a precious, museumised piece to be preserved. The story ends with a question about how we wish to use, own up to and live with our past: as

MARCO MONTALTI / GETTY IMAGES / ISTOCKPHOTO

How do we wish to use, to own up to and live with our past: as something locked away or put up on a museum wall to be seen occasionally, or something we wrap our everyday selves in, never forgetting the scars and memories that make us who we are?

something locked away or put up on a museum wall to be seen occasionally, or something we wrap our everyday selves in, never forgetting the scars and memories that make us who we are?

The motif of patchwork became widely popular again in punk fashion in the 1970s, which brought a new twist to the use of re-use and repair. The activist fashion designer Vivienne Westwood began a remarkable career in London by transforming the tattered, ripped and recycled into the "upcycled." Far from simply reproducing the frugality of their parents' generation, punks used patches to imply that any quest for authenticity or originality was doomed—everything contains patches, traces of what has gone before.

A major trend in art history in the past few decades, which has come to it from anthropology, is the study of the biography of works of art or architecture. Scholars study the many approaches to appropriation, despoliation and quotation, to repairing or changing the placement of an object, as lessons in contextual shifts of meaning. These ideas, in their many incarnations, have become part of the basic pedagogies and curricula of art schools. However, the celebration of the new, and the various aspects of status attached to it, continues to dominate, and the methods of innovative and creative adaptation still largely fall to the wayside. But there are encouraging signs of the tide turning, both in architectural practice and the study of architectural history.

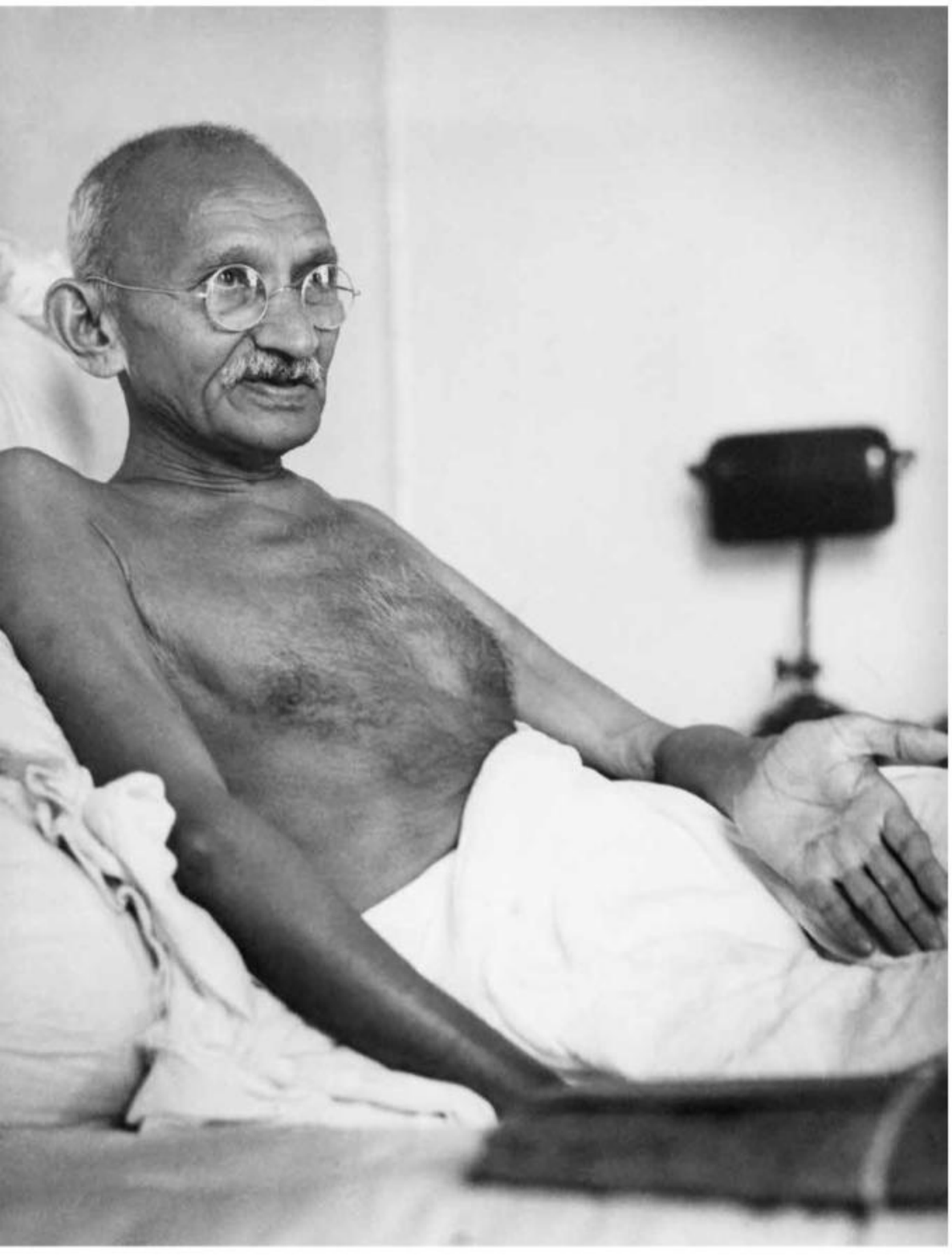
A sculpture may have been created as an idol for a temple at one date, but might have found itself replaced when a new king or other grandee donated another sculpture to the same temple. The sculpture's biography, then, sees it go from being a representation of god to just an extra object in a temple storeroom, and perhaps one day to becoming either scrap metal or a museum exhibit under a spotlight. In each incarnation, the object plays a different role that involves the people around it in different ways. First it was approached with faith and supplication, but in its last incarnation it may be treated as an aesthetic object to just be marvelled at. All of these equally valid forms of social engagement make up the object's rich history.

A word that describes this phenomenon is despoliation. Deriving from

THIS SPREAD:
Gandhi, famously, led a political campaign and deployed an aesthetic centred on frugality. His propaganda opposed extravagance, whether of the British Empire or Indian rulers.

the Latin *spolia*, the term has come to represent how fragments of a past are consciously appropriated to define a new context. Stone from Roman constructions was used to make numerous early Christian shrines. Many mosques have been converted into churches, and vice versa—one famous example is the Byzantine-era Hagia Sophia in Istanbul. Sometimes, buildings are repurposed by simply using the existing structure differently, or by bringing in minimal interventions. In its worst form, however, repurposing has meant buildings are torn down, and the raw construction materials are then utilised to make something new.

What we are seeing in Delhi—and also at Ayodhya, with the construction of a temple on the site of the demolished Babri Masjid—is tinged with a sentiment of re-conquest, of the eradication of history in order to write it afresh. In truth, history cannot be eradicated. A more astute approach lies not in erasing the past but in making a mark alongside the historically inherited, to show not just how the past can be claimed but also how the new builder is intervening in shaping the future.



VITHALBHAI JHAVERI / DINODIA PHOTO

Capitals all over the world function from old buildings that have seen much history. These buildings were often made well before the days of electricity or cars, but few countries have replaced their historic centres of administration simply to keep up with new technology. Instead, they renovated their buildings. The Reichstag in Berlin and Palace of Westminster in London exemplify such an approach. The buildings allowed leaders and governments to make significant comments on their countries' pasts—the Reichstag, for instance, has become a symbol of the reunification of Germany, among much else—and so to project vital messages for their countries' futures.

This approach can also be seen in the layering of history at Rashtrapati Bhavan, the president's residence, as well as its adjoining buildings, during the transition to independent rule. Even in the 1920s and 1930s, at the time they were designed by the British under the eye of the architect Edwin Lutyens, the buildings had to reveal themselves as inheritors of the many imperial and historical traditions of India. However, notwithstanding the accommodations of diverse forms and styles—Buddhist, Hindu, Islamic or Palladian—these buildings bore, above all, the mark of the British Empire. Lutyens' project faced criticism from its inception. Indian nationalists could not forgive or forget that Delhi's grand palaces had been built, at great expense to Indians, to glorify India's oppressors. In 1947, as the newly free Indian government took possession of the capital, these buildings became an embarrassment to leaders who could not justify occupying them in the manner of the departing British colonisers. Yet they were appreciated for their architectural merits, the quality of their construction and the extraordinary amount of money that had been spent on them. Breaking them down was not considered an option.

The decision was made to adapt the buildings by replacing motifs of imperialism with symbols of the Indian republic. The politics of the re-decoration and re-design of these buildings was the subject of a book I edited in 2016. It was not a minor challenge to execute the transformation, or layering. The ministry of home affairs, in 1949, advised provincial governments to remove British crowns and other pre-Independence symbols in a gradual, discreet and non-destructive manner, and to replace them with the four-headed lion—an emblem from the Mauryan Empire now borrowed to stand for the Indian republic. As this work had not been completed even by 1972, the matter was raised in parliament and a final deadline was set for 15 August 1973.

JIM BOURG / REUTERS

In fairness, replacing colonial symbols with Indian ones was a huge task. British insignia was emblazoned on archways and entrances, in the ironwork of fireplaces and on their mantelpieces, on candlesticks and wall lights, and even carved into furniture. Replacing it meant either re-carving things, cutting off existing symbols, and plastering, pasting or soldering on Indian alternatives. Another way was to put the old objects in a museum and make new replacements. As if the expense of all this was not enough, even the cutlery and other silverware needed to be replaced. By the time it came down to the buttons and epaulettes on the uniforms of the staff, however, the matter was considered less urgent, and it was decided that these would be tackled in a phased manner as the need arose.

After 1947, every opportunity was used to show off the finest Indian weaving and craftsmanship in the interiors. The result left visitors with a sense of grand, centuries-old traditions that had witnessed many an onslaught but had survived and remained undeniably Indian. Alongside all the transformations at Rashtrapati Bhavan, it was always recognised that the building would, nonetheless, always be a symbol of colonialism, and the interior design had to reflect an acceptance of living with and layering the past. Poignant reminders of India's colonial history were thus kept as part of the design. In the State Library, doorknobs in the shape of imperial British lions were preserved in the hope that every president who ever cares to open the door for themselves may be alerted to the long and chequered history they inhabit as they enter it.

It can be argued that it is often more economical to just toss out the old and bring in something new rather than undertake the painstaking work of repairing or restoring what is outdated or broken. Certainly there is much to say about learning to let go and not being unthinkingly attached to material from our past—and the prospect of a new start, of building afresh, of an opportunity to do something different, is always exciting. Just as there is a history of some Hindu kings who introduced new elements in old structures, there is also a history of others who destroyed old temples and built new ones in their place. Each ruler served the opinions of their public. The question with the project afoot in Delhi is: what is the statement that is necessary now? Is this the time for such extravagance and the destruction of public spaces?

Globally, there is a shift underway in what is considered good optics: visible, for instance, in the rising political support for various "green" parties among younger voters, especially in developed countries. The planetary precarity of the last few years on account of the pandemic and global lockdowns has only enhanced this trend, and there is no doubt that future voters in India too are going to judge our generation from the perspective of ecological as well as economic responsibility. The redeveloped Central Vista will be prominent in their scrutiny—after all, it is one of the country's most significant building projects in this century, which will continue to echo its statement well into the future. Regrettably, the statement appears to be guided by what was relevant fifty years ago: increasing parking rather than finding ways to reduce the use of personal vehicles; cutting down trees and stripping park land instead of creating more green spaces; making new buildings rather than adapting existing ones for extended use; and, above all, wasting the enormous earth resources, such as sand and stone, that are already in use in the present buildings.

Internationally, architecture and urban planning are increasingly focussed

on ways to prevent such waste. Governments are finding solutions to balance the need for economic growth with the need to reduce energy consumption and lower carbon emissions. City centres elsewhere have already become pedestrianised spaces where municipalities encourage the use of bicycles or battery-operated public transport. How then will the media and the electorate view the contrary decisions made by the Indian government to prioritise the building of temples and statues, and the destruction of an existing cityscape, when the country lacks adequate hospitals, schools and even sanitation? In a choking city, with among the highest levels of pollution in the world, we are tearing up the green cover of the Central Vista for parking lots. What's more, we are doing this in the year that trees in the parks of the national capital were felled to build funeral pyres for victims of COVID-19.

Much as art historians may try and revive a culture of jīrṇoddhāra, the attitude towards repair and conservation in India will not turn unless this approach is seen as also making economic sense. Attention to history as well as climate change and its attendant issues need not be in opposition to economic development. Rather, this can also generate jobs and spur productivity and innovation. This year's Pritzker Prize, the highest accolade in architecture, was awarded to Anne Lacaton and Jean-Philippe Vassal. The prize jury's statement explained, "Through their ideas, approach to the profession, and the resulting buildings, they have proven that a commitment to a restorative architecture that is at once technological, innovative, and ecologically responsive can be pursued without nostalgia." Their work, it further said, has "proposed an adjusted definition of the very profession of architecture." In one typical instance, "instead of demolition and reconstruction, they carefully added space to the existing buildings in the form of generous extensions, winter gardens and balconies ... There is a humility in the approach that respects the aims of the original designers and the aspirations of the current occupants." The award signified the growing change in attitudes in architecture, and reflected, in its own way, the philosophy of jīrṇoddhāra.

Yet we, in India, appear to be selecting an aesthetic of large-scale eradication of the old, and making a mark not with rich history or meaning but one that is all about triumphalism instead. This was precisely the mistake made by certain previous regimes, and they went on to lose their power and be remembered less than well by history. However hardwired garish optics may be in the popular Indian psyche—as seen, for instance, in most Indian weddings—so too is the equally powerful claim to abstinence and making-do with the least possible.

As curators, in museum galleries, we have to forever serve public perception. The stereotype of the *faqir* or the *sannyasi* and the wealth of the maharajas

The Reichstag in Berlin and Westminster in London exemplify how renovated buildings allow leaders and governments to make significant comments on their countries' pasts and so to project vital messages for their countries' futures.

are clichés with a long history, and both must be carefully balanced. Gandhi, famously, led a political campaign and deployed an aesthetic centred on frugality. His propaganda opposed extravagance, whether of the British Empire or Indian maharajas. Many of his own generation agreed with Sarojini Naidu's quip that it cost a lot to keep Gandhi in poverty, yet Gandhi had his finger on the pulse of his times and knew he would win the war of public perception. Similarly, the repeated austerity drives of many Western governments in the past few decades, their restaging of exhibitions and republishing of books on the aesthetic of "make do and mend" in the leading capitals of the world, and the rhetoric of the many emerging political manifestos in the more progressive democracies, all show that the intellectual and ethical tide of the world is turning, and the optics of what is politically correct or conscionable are shifting. As just one example, consider that Carrie Symonds rented (note: rented) a wedding dress for her marriage to the British prime minister, Boris Johnson, this May.

Conservation is something we need to think about deeply, because what we are trying to preserve or adapt is not merely cosmetic—it is not just buildings and streets and parks, but an attitude of respect, of sensibility and caution. It is an acknowledgement of the importance of history, of memory that we cannot barter for cheap economic or political gain. If jīrṇoddhāra seems too remote an idea, *jugaad* might be used instead to sum up the attitude of adapting, repurposing and fixing. Jugaad, as used colloquially across Hindi-speaking north India, can describe a quick and resourceful fix to any problem—an equivalent of "make do and mend." It is said that the etymological origins of jugaad lie in *jugat*, which derives from the Sanskrit *yukta*, meaning something that fits, that can be joined and made to work.

In the latter half of the twentieth century, the idea of an "original author" was questioned in many intellectual spaces, and there was a move towards recognising that we are all participants in processes much longer than the span of our lives. The discipline of conservation has moved beyond being just a specialised practical activity in a museum context to actually being a theoretical intervention with a convincing philosophical energy in society. Climate change, war and disease have, over the past century, strengthened this shift and brought about a sharper realisation of the implications of our presence for the past, present and future. This is reflected in the media and younger generations, and it is time for historians to start celebrating the processes of conservation too.

Serving the priorities of the next generation means being environmentally aware, quarrying less marble and stone, mitigating our carbon footprint, reducing emissions and so on. The ancient Romans and even the Lutyenses of the world may have got away with pleading ignorance of the planet's limited resources, but citizens of the future are not likely to forgive today's government for wasteful extravagance. ■

True media needs true allies.

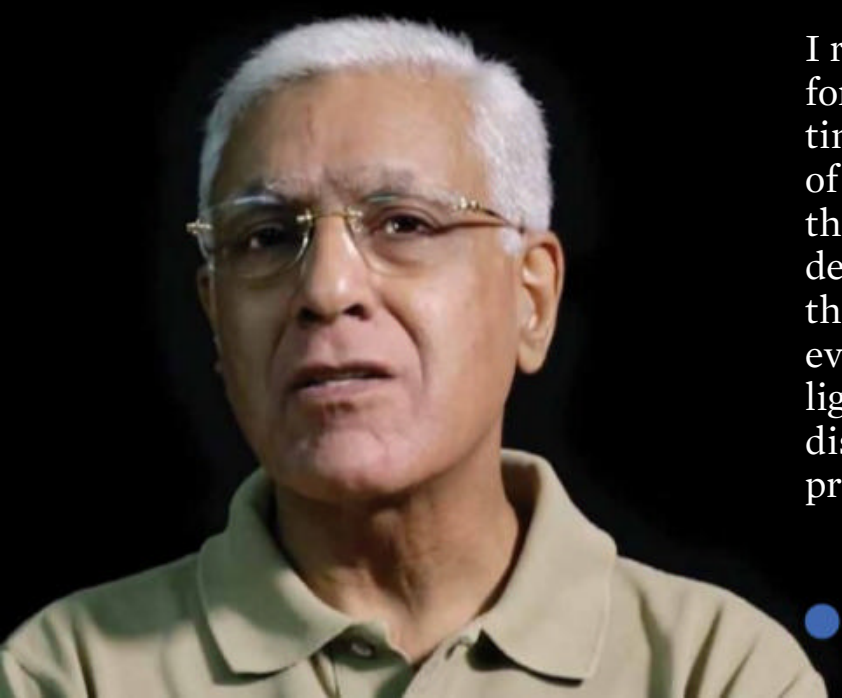
India needs bold, fair journalism more than ever.
We need allies like **YOU**.

I think that there will come a time when people will ask of the Indian media: What were you doing in those five years when a government came to power that spread hate and poison, that controlled the media, what were you doing then? And very few in the Indian media will be able to hold their heads up and say that we were calling the powerful to account. I think Caravan is one of the few magazines that will be able to hold its head up, if it stays afloat. And I hope it stays afloat, which is why I'm saying, please read Caravan.

ARUNDHATI ROY, Author

I love reading The Caravan, because the kind of reportage it does, is away from the din of fast news, of something which is out there, every news hour to debate upon. It's delivery of news which takes two steps back, goes back to the basic principles of reportage. Yes, sometimes I do not agree with the ideology, the ideological slant that the stories take. But overall, the way in which the reportage is done is something that one really looks forward to.

SHUBHRASTHA, Political Strategist, BJP



I recommend Caravan magazine because this is one of the most bold, forthright, creative and imaginative magazines that I've read in a very long time. But the most important quality is its truthfulness. The Loya series of articles, in particular, is an example of how it can unearth evidence that others have ignored or simply not wanted to find, how it can publish despite opposition and how it can continue to do so despite the fact that the government of the day is embarrassed, and probably angry, and doing everything it can to stop the magazine. Caravan stands out as a striking light in a country where otherwise press freedom seems to be more often dishonoured rather than updated. I recommend Caravan as one of the best products that Indian journalism has produced in a very long time.

KARAN THAPAR, Journalist

TOP WEB EXCLUSIVES AT
CARAVANMAGAZINE.IN

Kashmiri woman's statement to court belies Sirsa's forced-conversion narrative, reveals complex story

SHAHID TANTRAY AND PRABHJIT SINGH

Why Punjab CM's decision to offer plum jobs to sons of Congress MLAs defies reason

JATINDER KAUR TUR

How the Facebook-Reliance combine and the farm laws pave the way for digital colonisation

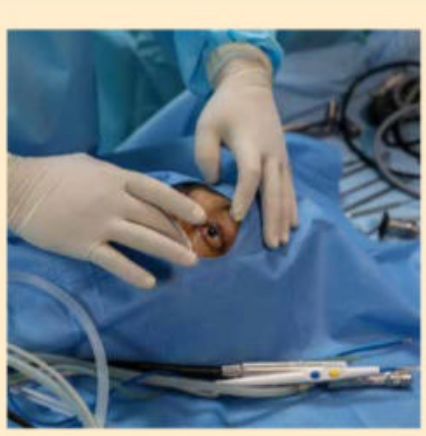
DANIEL BLOCK

Neither sacrilege nor Khalistan connection in Gurdaspur lynching case: Punjab Police

JATINDER KAUR TUR

UP policeman suspended; accused of illegal custody, brutal torture of former Indian Army soldier

PRABHJIT SINGH



COVID-19, steroids and diabetes—why mucormycosis is now a deadly epidemic in India

CHAHAT RANA

How Assam's upper-caste controlled media reinforces the othering of tribal communities

MANORANJAN PEGU

Majority of 2011 paper co-authored by criminal law committee member is plagiarised

AMRITA SINGH

Are moves afoot to restore statehood in Jammu and Kashmir?

BHARAT BHUSHAN

"There's a lot of blood, sweat and tears": The price that India's first women doctors paid to break barriers

NAYANTARA NARAYANAN

TOP WEB EXCLUSIVES AT HINDI.CARAVANMAGAZINE.IN

"Media misreported my ordeal to defame farmers' movement": Tikri sexual-harassment survivor

JATINDER KAUR TUR

बक्सवाहा : जो जंगल सरकार का नहीं है उसकी नीलामी कैसे हो सकती है?

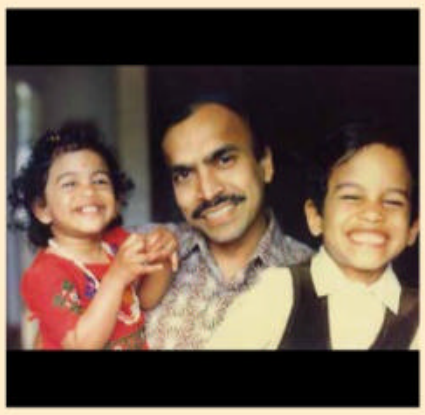
सत्यम श्रीवास्तव

A young farmer leader on how seven months of protests created democratic spaces

PRABHJIT SINGH

झारखंड में गढ़वा के रपुरा गांव के प्रजापतियों को सड़क नहीं दे रहे राजपूत, कहते हैं मुख्यमंत्री की औकात नहीं कि खुलवा लें रास्ता

मो. असग़र खान



After 36 years, families of 1985 Air India blast victims struggle without closure

JATINDER KAUR TUR

पंजाब हाई कोर्ट में 6733 गुमशुदगी और अवैध दाह संस्कार की जांच याचिका दायर

जतिंदर कौर तुड़

Amid pandemic, India's political prisoners struggle with failing health in unequipped jails

NILEENA MS

"केंद्र सरकार द्वारा फोन टैप करवाना लोकतंत्र का अपमान", कर्नाटक के नेता

निकीता सक्सेना

Assam Rifles major accused of killing civilian in Manipur; reopens debate on AFSPA

KIMI COLNEY

इसरो जासूसी मामला : नई याचिका में नंबी नारायणन और पूर्व सीबीआई अधिकारियों के बीच "संदिग्ध" भूमि सौदे का आरोप

निलीना एम एस

ESSAY

Guruji's Lie

The RSS and MS Golwalkar's undeniable links to Nazism

COVER STORY / HISTORY

DHIRENDRA K JHA

ILLUSTRATION BY SUKRUTI ANAH STANELEY

IT HAS REMAINED a long-standing puzzle whether the controversial book *We or Our Nationhood Defined* was authored by MS Golwalkar or was just his translation of a Marathi book written by Ganesh Damodar Savarkar, the elder brother of the famous Hindutva ideologue Vinayak Damodar Savarkar. This is no ordinary authorship dispute. Golwalkar, the second *sarsanghchalak*—chief—of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, who held the post between 1940 and 1973, remains one of the most influential figures in the Sangh's history. *We*, published in 1939 under his name, played a key part in making him a prominent figure within the RSS and was considered the first systematic explication of the Sangh's ideology. Taking inspiration from Adolf Hitler, it asserted that India belongs to Hindus and that the country's minorities should be treated along the lines of the Nazis' treatment of the Jews. The book inextricably tied the RSS to the fascist ideology of Nazi Germany.

On 15 May 1963, while addressing a crowd during a celebration of VD Savarkar's eightieth birth anniversary—which the ideologue's followers in Mumbai commemorated with a "militarisation week"—Golwalkar claimed that the book was in fact an abridged translation of Ganesh Savarkar's *Rashtramimansa va Hindustanchen Rashtraswarup*. Ganesh Savarkar, also known as Babarao Savarkar, was one of the five founding members of the RSS. *Rashtramimansa*, whose title translates to "Theory of Nations and the Transformation of Hindustan," was published under the pseudonym "Durgatanay" in 1934, five years before the publication of *We*.

Golwalkar's disclosure was not considered newsworthy at the time, and this part of his speech did not appear in any newspaper, according to DR Goyal's history of the Sangh. But after the Bharatiya Janata Party, the RSS's political outfit, came to national power in the late 1990s, it was dusted off and held up as a shield against uncomfortable questions that began to be raised about the Sangh's affinity with Nazism. Ever since, the BJP, the RSS and their supporters have tried to use the claim to distance themselves, and Golwalkar, from the ideology.

Golwalkar's claim has never met any serious scrutiny. The primary reason is that Babarao's Marathi book went out of circulation soon after its publication, was never reprinted and has long been forgotten. Babarao himself died in 1945, almost two decades before Golwalkar's claim. As a result, no contemporary researcher or critic has attempted comparing the two texts.

I found a copy of the 1934 text in the Mumbai Marathi Grantha Sangrahalaya, one of the oldest libraries in the city, in October last year. On comparing *We* to Babarao's work, one thing became amply clear: Golwalkar's claim in his 1963 speech was a lie. The love for Nazi Germany expressed in *We* and the book's recommendation for India to emulate the Nazis are nowhere to be found in *Rashtramimansa*.

In the late 1930s and 1940s, many RSS members were enamoured with European fascists. Contemporary accounts suggest that, during this period, Golwalkar sought to turn the RSS into a Nazi-style militia, with the goal of eventually installing himself as führer. Golwalkar's own writings, and biographical accounts dating to before 1963, also disprove the claim that *We* was merely a translation.

Golwalkar's plan to be führer backfired after Mohandas Gandhi was assassinated in 1948 by a member of the RSS, which led to a government crackdown on the organisation. As the Nazis and the RSS became increasingly reviled, Golwalkar sought an image makeover, and tried to portray himself as a spiritual guru. It was in this context that he tried to distance himself from his creation in 1963. But, as many researchers and journalists have documented, *We* and its ideas remain an integral part of the RSS's worldview, and of its hopes for India.

GOLWALKAR DEFINITELY drew inspiration from *Rashtramimansa* and used it as one of his main sources—he acknowledges Babarao's influence in the preface to *We*. "In compiling this work, I have received help from numerous quarters, too many to mention," Golwalkar writes. "I thank them all heartily; but I cannot help separately naming one and expressing my gratefulness to him—*Deshbhakta* GD Savarkar. His work *Rashtra Meemansa* in Marathi has been one of my chief sources of inspiration and help. An English translation of this work is due to be shortly out and I take this opportunity of directing the reader to that book for a more exhaustive study of the subject." Thus, while writing the book, Golwalkar had no confusion regarding its authorship. He knew of Babarao's book and endorsed it, but made it clear that *We* was his own work, not a translation. Golwalkar never claimed in his book, or in any of his speeches and writings over the next two and a half decades, that his work was a translation of *Rashtramimansa*.

After I went through *Rashtramimansa*, I found that all the critical formulations mentioned in *We* belonged solely to Golwalkar—especially its project of promoting a Hindu culture along the lines of Nazi antisemitism and its prescription of total assimilation or ethnic cleansing to deal with the problem of minorities in India. These

OPPOSITE PAGE:
In 1963, Golwalkar claimed his book *We or Our Nationhood Defined*, in which he showered praise on German Nazis and suggested a Nazi-style government in India, was not his own creation but a translation of *Rashtramimansa* by Ganesh Savarkar. This was a lie.

formulations find no place in *Rashtramimansa*, even though both Golwalkar and Babarao were ideologically on the same page.

"To keep up the purity of the Race and its culture, Germany shocked the world by her purging the country of the Semitic Races—the Jews," Golwalkar writes. "Race pride at its highest has been manifested here. Germany has also shown how well-nigh impossible it is for Races and cultures, having differences going to the root, to be assimilated into one united whole, a good lesson for us in Hindusthan to learn and profit by."

Having declared non-Hindus to be foreign races—and taking inspiration not just from the Nazi genocide of the Jews but also from how countries such as the United States, Britain and France dealt with minorities—Golwalkar writes:

> From this standpoint, sanctioned by the experience of shrewd old nations, the foreign races in Hindusthan must either adopt the Hindu culture and language, must learn to respect and hold in reverence Hindu religion, must entertain no idea but those of the glorification of the Hindu race and culture, i.e., of the Hindu nation and must lose their separate existence to merge in the Hindu race, or may stay in the country, wholly subordinated to the Hindu Nation, claiming nothing, deserving no privileges, far less any preferential treatment—not even citizen's rights. There is, at least should be, no other course for them to adopt. We are an old nation; let us deal, as old nations ought to and do deal, with the foreign races, who have chosen to live in our country.

At another place in the book, Golwalkar extols the Nazis and Italian Fascists for having established a brand of racial superiority. "Look at Italy, the old Roman Race consciousness of conquering the whole territory round the Mediterranean Sea, so long dormant, has roused itself, and shaped the Racial-National aspirations accordingly," he writes. "The ancient Race spirit, which prompted the Germanic tribes to over-run the whole of Europe has re-risen in modern Germany, with the result that the Nation perforce follows the aspirations predetermined by the traditions left by its depredatory ancestors. Even so with us: our Race spirit has once again roused itself as is evidenced by the race of spiritual giants we have produced, and who today stalk the world in serene majesty."

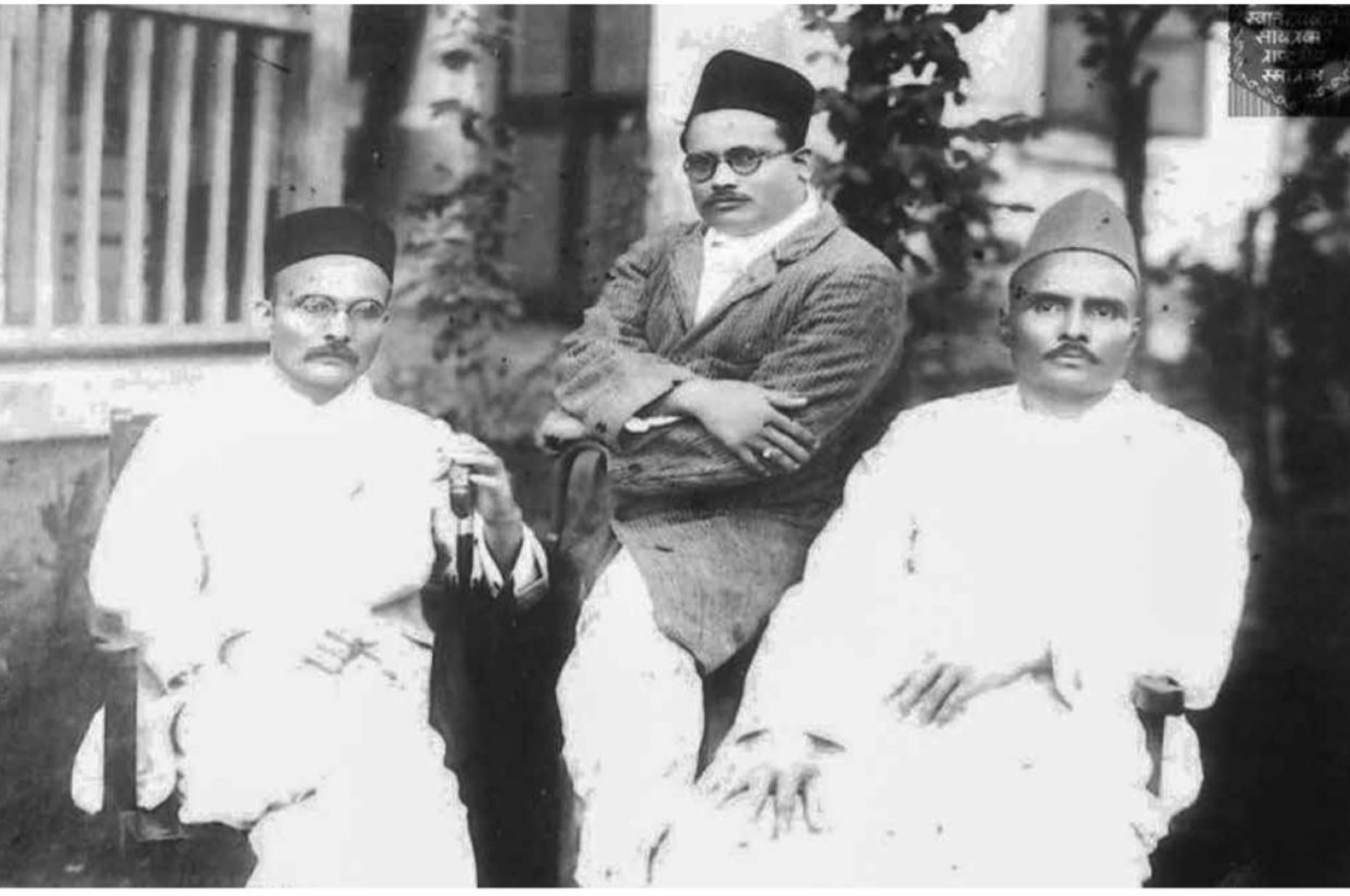
Golwalkar is so enamoured with the Nazis that he even supports their claim over Austria and Czechoslovakia, which played a key role in triggering the Second World War:

> Modern Germany strove, and has to a great extent achieved what she strove for, to once again bring under one sway the whole of the territory, hereditarily Possessed by the Germans but which, as a result of political disputes, had been portioned off as different countries under different states. Austria for example, was merely a province, on par with Prussia, Bavaria and other principalities, which made the Germanic Empire. Logically Austria should not be an independent kingdom, but be one with the rest of Germany. So also with those portions, inhabited by Germans, which had been included, after the [First World] War, in the new State of Czechoslovakia. German pride in their Fatherland for a definite home country ... awoke and ran the risk of starting a fresh world-conflagration, in order to establish one,

unparalleled, undisputed German Empire over all this "hereditary territory".

Rashtramimansa is rooted in the theoretical premise set forth in VD Savarkar's 1923 text *Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?* Like his brother, Babarao argues that India belongs to Hindus because of its racial, religious, cultural and geographical characteristics, and that Muslims, being a foreign race, have no claim over it. He also discusses the dominant role of religion in governance and the condition of minorities in select European territories, including England, Germany, Austria, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Russia, Poland, the Free City of Danzig, Estonia and Finland. Here is the book's entire section on Germany:

> Kings used to rule in Germany. In those days, a religious oath was in vogue. After becoming a democratic nation, it has retained the tradition of the religious oath, along with an oath in the name of the president. In this way, efforts have been made to ensure space for religion, even in miniscule ways, in the political system of Germany. The Reichstag has legally secured



ABOVE: The three brothers—Vinayak, Narayan and Ganesh Savarkar (from Left to Right)—were all famous Hindutva leaders.

holidays on Sundays and specific festival days. These holidays are meant for relaxation and spiritual well-being.
European countries are primarily inhabited by Christians. Some Muslims and Jews also live in Europe, but the holidays have been decided on the basis of Christian belief system. One should note that "spiritual well-being" has been specifically mentioned as the reason for these holidays. This makes it clear that Christianity is the state-sponsored religion. ... Minorities are allowed to use their language in their personal interactions in those parts of the country where they are concentrated. The German laws and the administration do not create any hindrance in exercising this right.

There is not a word in *Rashtramimansa* about the Nazi regime, nor about its treatment of the Jews. It is unlikely that Babarao knew anything about the Nazis when he wrote his book, which was published in 1934—only a year after Hitler came to power. Although the Nazis instituted a boycott of Jewish-owned businesses and promulgated discriminatory laws in civil services and educational institutions in 1933, a full-fledged attack on Jewish life and property began only after Hitler combined the offices of president and chancellor by declaring himself führer, on 19 August 1934. Hitler's aggressive steps towards rebuilding the German military and expanding the Third Reich across Europe, which included the aggression towards Austria and Czechoslovakia that Golwalkar refers to, began in 1935, a year after *Rashtramimansa* was published.

Babarao's description of Austria and Czechoslovakia in *Rashtramimansa* is completely different from Golwalkar's in *We*. About Austria, Babarao writes that German was recognised as the official language, and minorities could use their own languages only in personal interactions. "In the absence of a foreign religious sect or a foreign culture, there is no need for law to obstruct [minorities'] practices," he writes.

In a similar manner, Babarao points out that Czechoslovakia was free from internal trouble because Czech was recognised as the official language and Roman Catholicism enjoyed the backing of the state. "Czechoslovakia is caught in the middle of Germany, Austria, Hungary and Poland," Babarao writes. "These countries are inhabited primarily by Roman Catholic people, and this religion is recognised in Czechoslovakia as the state religion. Czech language is made mandatory for everyone here." Unlike Golwalkar, Babarao seems unaware of Nazi claims over Austria and Czechoslovakia, and, therefore, wrote nothing about the issue.

Thus, the sections about Germany in *We* were clearly original formulations of its author, given that they were inspired by contemporary developments in the country. In 1938, a year before *We* was published, Nazi hostility towards the Jews reached a critical point with the Kristallnacht pogroms, in which Jewish homes, synagogues, hospitals and schools were ransacked across Germany. Hundreds of Jews were killed, and thousands arrested and sent to concentration camps. These pogroms set the stage for the murder of an unfathomable number of Jewish people in the years to follow.

GOLWALKAR'S BOOK and the RSS's ethos were never at odds with each other. In fact, by increasing his credibility in the Sangh, the book catapulted Golwalkar to a major position in the RSS—as revealed by the timeline of events that followed the completion of the manuscript, in November 1938.

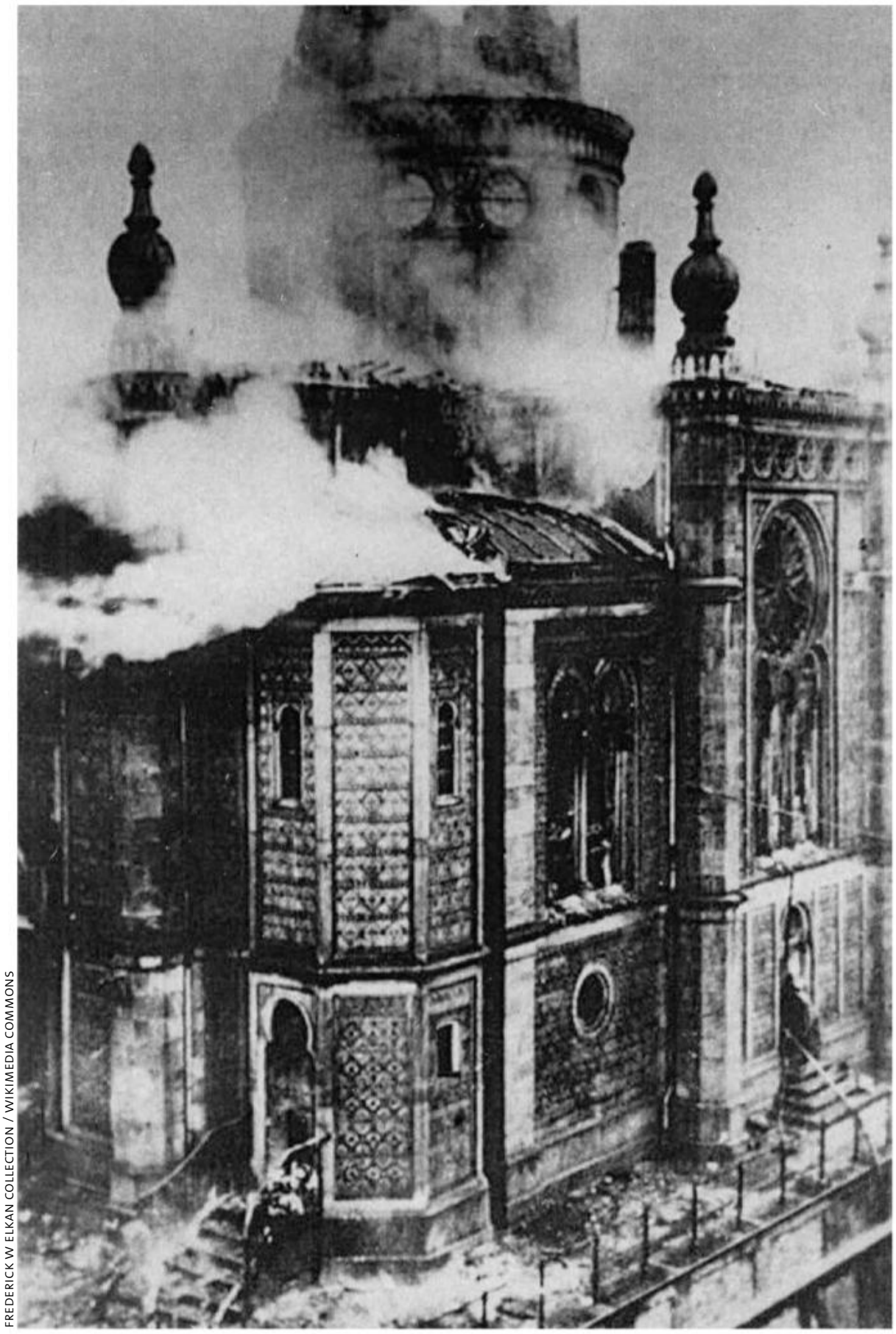
In February 1939, weeks before the book was published, the RSS organised a special meeting of its more prominent members in the village of Sindi, near Nagpur. This was a ten-day brainstorming session, called to review and improve the Sangh's methodology and organisational structure. Golwalkar, though relatively new to the Sangh, attended the meeting as one of a select group of insiders—at the time, he was practically the right-hand man of the first sarsanghchalak, KB Hedgewar. The meeting led to the creation of the RSS's official Sanskrit prayer, commands in Sanskrit for use in the RSS's *shakhas*—branches—and an organisational structure and management system for its annual Sangh Shiksha Varg, also called the Officers' Training Camp. "All the participants noticed Guruji's highly analytical intellect, logical approach, sharp focus, strong ideological clarity," Ranga Hari writes in *The Incomparable Guru Golwalkar*.

Ranga Hari's book, like other RSS-sanctioned biographies of Golwalkar, suggests that it was during these meetings that Hedgewar first raised the idea of Golwalkar succeeding him as sarsanghchalak. Hari reproduces a recollection of the meeting by Appaji Joshi, the Sangh's *sarkaryavah*—general secretary—at the time. As the second-in-command of the RSS, Joshi was himself a prospective candidate for the post. During an informal discussion, Hari writes, Hedgewar asked Joshi what he thought of nominating Golwalkar as the next sarsanghchalak. According to Hari, "Appaji Joshi responded immediately with one word, 'Excellent.'" Hari adds that the incident "has been described in one of the articles in Appaji Joshi's memoirs."

After Golwalkar's book was published, in March 1939, it quickly became his calling card among the RSS cadre. "Most of the RSS swayamsevaks came to know him first as the author of a tract, *We or Our Nationhood Defined*, which they had seen as the first scientific presentation of the RSS theory of Hindu nationalism," DR Goyal writes. In August 1939, five months after the book came out, Hedgewar appointed Golwalkar as the sarkaryavah of the RSS following a series of consultations with his senior colleagues. In accordance with Hedgewar's request, just before his death on 21 June 1940, Golwalkar was made the new sarsanghchalak, bypassing several senior office-bearers—a clear indication of the Sangh's endorsement to the views expressed in *We*.

The virulent idea that forms the core of the Sangh's creed—that Hindus must be granted the exclusive right to define India's national identity—was still in a nebulous form in the Savarkar brothers' books. Golwalkar's text, gleefully presenting the Nazi treatment of the Jews as a model to be applied to Indian Muslims, developed this principle in detail.

It is not that the RSS was earlier unaware of the contemporary dictatorships in Europe. The Italian scholar Marzia Casolari writes that, during the Second World War, "Hindu nationalism seemed to uneasily oscillate between a conciliatory attitude towards the British, and a sympathy for the dictators." Its adherents saw the



FREDERICK W ELKAN COLLECTION / WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

RIGHT: **The Wiesbaden synagogue was burned by Nazis in a series of anti-Jewish attacks throughout Germany and Austria on 10 November 1938 known as Kristallnacht pogroms. In 1938, a year before We was published, Nazi hostility towards the Jews reached a critical point.**

OPPOSITE PAGE: **A worker clearing broken glass in a Jewish shop following the anti-Jewish pogroms of Kristallnacht in Berlin.**

I found a copy of the 1934 text in the Mumbai Marathi Grantha Sangrahalaya, one of the oldest libraries in the city, in October last year. On comparing *We* to Babarao's work, one thing became amply clear: Golwalkar's claim in his 1963 speech was a lie.

HULTON ARCHIVE / GETTY IMAGES

European dictatorships as examples of conservative revolution—a concept that was being discussed widely by the Marathi press. The aspects of fascism that appealed most to Hindu militants were its stress on the militarisation of society and the fixation on a strong leader controlling a highly centralised organisation. BS Moonje, a Hindu Mahasabha leader who was Hedgewar's mentor and one of the founders of the RSS, met Benito Mussolini during a 1931 visit to Italy. Following Moonje's return, the RSS drew substantially from Fascist pedagogical practices. Even so, Golwalkar's book took this attraction to fascism to a new level.

For most of the 1940s, until it was banned in the aftermath of Gandhi's assassination, the RSS openly propagated Golwalkar's ideas. With his book as the guiding force, the new sarsanghchalak set out to convert the RSS into something akin to his own Nazi militia. He tried to model himself as a dictator—as a teacher, as the supreme organiser of the Sangh, sits chief tactician, demagogic saviour and sole leader. All this was reflected in the ideological classes held at the Officer's Training Camps. An Intelligence Bureau report on a camp held at Poona in April and May 1942 recorded Golwalkar's lectures in detail.

Golwalkar addressed RSS volunteers on seven occasions during the camp. "Hindus alone had so far proved loyal to the country; therefore they alone were eligible for enrolment to the Sangh," he is reported as saying in one lecture. "Whoever, forgetting his traditions, joins hands with the enemies should be killed even if he were their own brother, because only he who follows and sticks to their principles would be regarded as their real brother. The mental apathy of the Hindus should be removed and a feeling of hatred towards the men of other religions, who were getting high-handed, should be created in them. The Sangh was doing this work."

The IB report notes that, on 3 May 1942, Golwalkar "made an important speech in which he clearly revealed the communal and Fascist nature of the organisation. He said that the

Sangh had been started not only for combating Muslim aggression but for completely extirpating that disease; it was therefore necessary to have proper men at the helm whose attention should be focused on the achievement of their goal."

The RSS ideologue most outspoken in his support for the European dictatorships during the Poona camp was PG Sahasrabuddhe, who was known for promoting a pro-authoritarian state of mind among swayamsevaks in his lectures. On 4 May, the IB report says, Sahasrabuddhe "announced that the Sangh followed the principle of dictatorship. Denouncing democratic government as an unsatisfactory form of government, he quoted France as a typical bad example and, praising dictatorship, he pointed to Japan, Russia and Germany. He particularly praised the Fuehrer principle of Germany." In a lecture on 21 May, the report adds, "he drew attention to the value of propaganda, quoting Russia and Germany as examples, and again extolled the virtues of the Leader principle, citing Mussolini's success as a further example."

Golwalkar wanted to cast himself during this period as the Hindu führer: a dictator fighting for the supremacy of Hindus by subjugating—and even "extirpating"—Muslims, just as Hitler was trying to establish the supposed supremacy of the German race by annihilating the Jews.

According to the IB, the RSS volunteers attending the camp were encouraged to read not only the biographies of Hedgewar, Savarkar and the Maratha king Shivaji, but also those of Hitler and Mussolini.

Another IB report, prepared in 1943, says that the RSS "is aimed at bringing the Hindus of India under the control of a dictator (Guru ji) and solidify their organization for the ultimate purpose of capturing political power. A spirit of discipline, martial tendencies and developing healthy bodies by the Hindus is to be inculcated so that the Hindu nation may turn matchless in strength due to its overwhelming majority in India."

Golwalkar wanted to cast himself during this period as the Hindu führer: a dictator fighting for the supremacy of Hindus by subjugating—and even "extirpating"—Muslims, just as Hitler was trying to establish the supposed supremacy of the German race by annihilating the Jews. In this context, *We* seems to have been the first step—an ideological blueprint—towards achieving a version of the Nazi model in India.

As Golwalkar's thought became central to the RSS's ideological training, the demand for *We* increased phenomenally. In his book *Hindu Nationalism: Origins, Ideologies and Modern Myths*, the sociologist Chetan Bhatt writes that the tract was republished four times during the 1940s.

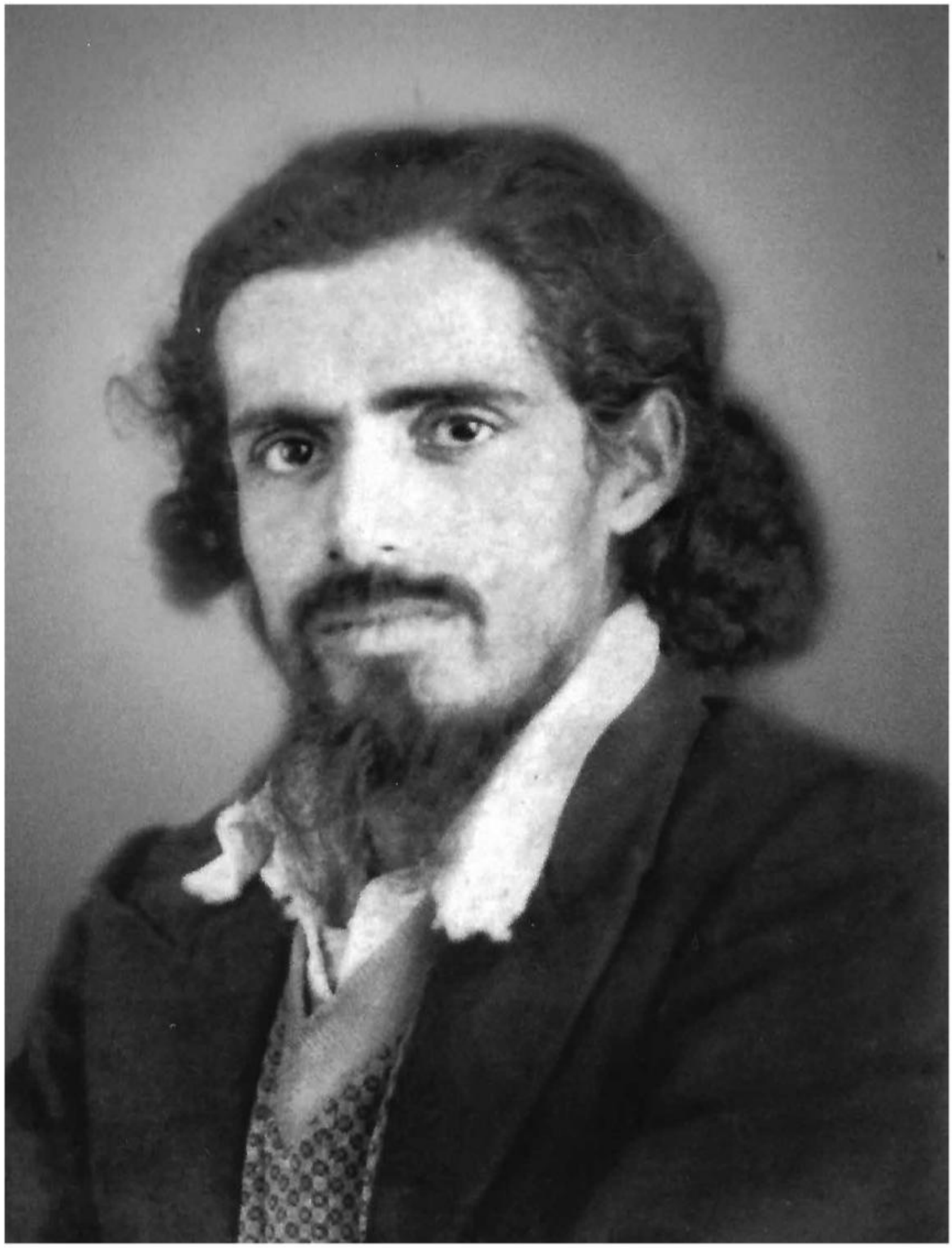
THE ASSASINATION OF GANDHI, on 30 January 1948, dramatically changed the situation. The RSS was banned, its public credibility reached an all-time low and Golwalkar was arrested along with thousands of other Sangh members. A government communiqué justifying the ban stated that the RSS was involved in "undesirable and even dangerous activities."

"It has been found that in several parts of the country individual members of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh have indulged in acts of violence involving arson, robbery, dacoity and murder and have collected illicit arms and ammunition," the communiqué said. "They have been found circulating leaflets exhorting people to resort to terrorist methods, to collect firearms, to create disaffection against the Government and suborn the Police and Military."

After he was released and the ban on the RSS was lifted, in 1949, Golwalkar remained deeply unsettled for some time. Since the government's actions had challenged to the RSS's very existence, he moved cautiously and became unusually conscious of his image. Golwalkar had to exercise especial restraint in light of the overwhelming presence and popularity of Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, who took an avowedly secular approach to governance and enjoyed wide acceptance across communities, including Hindus. As the world reacted in shock to the horrors of Nazism, Golwalkar sensed the dangerous implications of what he had written in *We*. Disowning the book was a natural corollary.

Even though the political project laid out in his book remained important, he shelved the idea of projecting himself as a Hindu führer. Now, careful attempts were made to obscure the trail of his past life and to glorify himself as a saintly character, a Hindu guru.

Golwalkar set out to execute this transformation through a series of biographies by his loyalists, seemingly written under his supervision. The first two were written immediately after the government unbanned the RSS. Gangadhar Indurkar's *Guruji: Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh ke Sarsanghchalak Shri Madhav Sadashiv Golwalkarji ka Jeevan-Charitra*, published in 1949, and Jagat S Bright's *India's*



LEFT: A 1938 photo of Golwalkar. In the late 1930s and 1940s, enamoured with European fascists, Golwalkar sought to turn the RSS into a Nazi-style militia, with the goal of eventually installing himself as führer.

Man of Destiny, published in 1950, show how methodically the project was pursued. The same is true of two more biographies released in 1956, to mark his fiftieth birthday: NH Palkar's Marathi title *Maa. Sa. Golwalkar* and BN Bhargava's *Shri Guruji: The Man & His Mission*. All these biographers approached Golwalkar with a great degree of awe, and preferred to write about him allegorically, as an object of worship, rather than with a solid grounding in facts.

An account by Hemendra Nath Pandit, a former *pracharak*—or fulltime RSS worker—who was part of the Sangh's national executive body until he left the organisation in 1950, reveals some aspects of Golwalkar's image-makeover. "His admirers would tell you that he takes only one meal a day," as Hindu saints are expected to do, Pandit writes. "It has been my experience, however, to see him sit by the side of some of us on at least two occasions at Nagpur and take two full meals at 12

noon and 9 P.M. besides tea and tiffin at the usual hours."

Pandit also mentions efforts "to make the young swayamsevaks believe that Golwalkar is the incarnation of Lord Krishna himself." He narrates the story of a pracharak telling swayamsevaks in West Bengal that "Madhava of Mahabharat" had again appeared "to lead Hindus to victory." Madhav, Golwalkar's first name, is one of many names for the Hindu deity Krishna. "Mahatma Gandhi's favourite 'Ram Dhun' has undergone a change in the RSS," Pandit writes. "The line Ishwara Allah tere nam"—Ishwar and Allah refer to the same god—"is considered objectionable and the Sangh therefore has its own reading as Keshava Madhava tere nam." Keshav, another name for Krishna, was also the first name of Hedgewar.

Golwalkar's bid to be seen as a man of strong spiritual tendencies changed his attitude towards the press. Pandit talks of Golwalkar's fondness, prior to his transformation exercise, for getting photographed and seeing his pictures circulated widely. But as he pursued a spiritual image, he took zealous care to appear averse to publicity. A report published in the *Times of India* on 9 April 1956, for instance, said that Golwalkar

As the world reacted in shock to the horrors of Nazism, Golwalkar sensed the dangerous implications of what he had written in *We*. Disowning the book was a natural corollary.

"threatened to leave a public meeting held to felicitate him on his 51st birthday, at the Ramlila grounds, if press photographers insisted on taking his picture."

Golwalkar's public transformation had little effect on the Sangh's internal view of his work. Even in 1956, when his makeover project was at its peak, the RSS still considered *We* to be "an unassailable exposition of the doctrine of 'nationhood' and its specific application in regard to Hindusthan," as Bhargava wrote in *Shri Guruji*.

Golwalkar's act was consistent with the Sangh's penchant for spreading disinformation for political ends—whether it was hiding the sordid events of its past or distorting history to create Islamophobia among Hindus. In the years after Gandhi's assassination, the RSS used disinformation and propaganda on a much larger scale than it did in the past.

BIOGRAPHICAL ACCOUNTS of Golwalkar and his own writings prior to May 1963, when he suddenly disowned *We*, do not in any way support the claim that he was not the book's author. On the contrary, they provide more evidence that *We* was Golwalkar's own creation and that *Rashtramimansa* was a separate work.

In 1944, a Hindi translation of *Rashtramimansa* appeared, with an introduction by Golwalkar. The introduction is exhaustive, running into 33 pages, and deals with the themes of Babarao's text. "The political situation of our nation is going through a fundamental change, and several types of nation ideas have emerged because of differences on some basic questions of nationalism," Golwalkar writes. "This small book is being published with a clear objective to forewarn Indians and to make them aware of the true perspective of the idea of a nation."

Elsewhere in the introduction, he continues:

A misconception has been spread that in the entire world the word nation is defined by geographical boundaries alone and that it has no place for race, religion, culture, etc. Blinded by this misconception, the so-called people with modern ideas ridicule those principles which were postulated by our ancient scholars on the basis of their enormous and practical knowledge. ... This book will be useful for opening the eyes of such people and putting them on the right track to understand the meaning of the real nation-work.

"With firmness in faith," Golwalkar adds, "the author of this book, by showing the practical picture of Hindustan-Hindu Rashtra, has asked conscious Hindus to become capable, organised and potent, and to come forward to promote the future prospects of our ancient race and culture."

Golwalkar also uses the introduction to put forth some of his own thoughts on how to deal with minorities—thoughts that he had postulated in *We* but which were not present in Babarao's book. "Sometimes even those leaders whose love for the nation is beyond any doubt ask questions like 'What would you do with non-Hindus?' or 'Would you force them to leave the country?' or 'What would be the provisions for minorities in India?'" he writes. "All these questions are, no doubt, sincere." Referring to non-Hindus as foreigners, he issues a categorical warning to them: "The one thing that is expected from these foreigners is that they must not be dishonest to the nation and should stop creating obstructions for national development."

In conclusion, Golwalkar writes, "The author wishes his small book to provide a scientific approach to look at our political and social life and, by encouraging the understanding of the true meaning of nationhood, arouse a love for Hindu Rashtra so that this nation could attain unity and

proceed on the path of development with firmness and greatness. May this wish be fulfilled and Hindus regain their position as spiritual leaders of the world."

Nowhere in the introduction does Golwalkar give even the faintest suggestion that his 1939 book was merely an abridged translation of *Rashtramimansa*. In fact, the introduction proves that, whatever *We* may have been, it was definitely not an English version of Babarao's work.

This was also attested by JA Curran Jr, the US researcher credited with the first scholarly attempt to study the RSS. Based on his field research, conducted during 1949 and 1950—immediately after the ban on the Sangh was lifted—Curran prepared a detailed report for the New York-based Institute of Pacific Relations,

BELOW: In February 1939, weeks before Golwalkar's book *We* was published, the RSS organised a meeting of its prominent members in the village of Sindi, near Nagpur. Golwalkar, though relatively new to the Sangh, attended the meet as one of a select group of insiders.

KEYSTONE-FRANCE / GAMMA-KEYSTONE / GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE: According to an Intelligence Bureau report, the RSS volunteers attending a 1942 training camp were encouraged to read not only the biographies of Hedgewar, Savarkar and the Maratha king Shivaji, but also those of Hitler and Mussolini.

titled "Militant Hinduism in Indian Politics: A Study of the R.S.S." According to this document, despite the ban and massive public outrage against the RSS in the wake of the Gandhi's assassination, the "genuine ideology of the Sangh" continued to be based on Golwalkar's book. "*We* can be described as the RSS 'Bible,'" Curran writes. "It is the basic primer in the indoctrination of Sangh volunteers." Although the book had been written "in a national context different from the contemporary one," he adds, "the principles contained in it are still considered entirely applicable by the Sangh membership."

Curran too noted an extremely conciliatory tone in Golwalkar's speeches since late 1949, but that did not deter him from concluding that no matter what Golwalkar said in his speeches, his book continued to form the foundation for "the plans and activities" of the contemporary Sangh.

Curran's observations regarding Golwalkar's book are particularly significant because he was the first "outsider" to be given full access to the organisation by the Sangh leadership. He acknowledges this in the preface of his paper:

> The gratitude the author owes to R.S.S. members for their assistance in his research cannot be exaggerated. In

every echelon of this organization, from Mr. Golwalkar, its leader, down to the newest recruits, the story was generally the same. Opportunities were constantly provided to ask numerous questions about plans and activities, as well as to observe the Sangh's operation. The bulk of this study is based on a year and a half of frequent association with the R.S.S.

Neither of the two 1956 biographies by Golwalkar's loyalists disputes his authorship of *We*. BN Bhargava writes, while talking about Golwalkar's life around 1939,

During this period he made another inestimable contribution. In a neat little book he expounded very ably the philosophy of nationalism, to propagate which Dr. Hedgewar had founded the R.S.S. 'WE' or 'Our Nationhood Defined' is an unassailable exposition of the doctrine of 'nationhood' and its specific application in regard to Hinduism. Subsequent developments have established beyond all doubt the truth of his thesis. It is interesting to note that this book of more than a hundred pages was written within three days—and that too without interfering with any daily chores.

ABOVE: Golwalkar addresses a public meeting in Hubli in 1949. Through most of the 1940s, Golwalkar advocated treating India's minorities in the way Nazi Germany dealt with the Jews.

"His admirers would tell you that he takes only one meal a day," as Hindu saints are expected to do, Pandit writes. "It has been my experience, however, to see him sit by the side of some of us on at least two occasions at Nagpur and take two full meals at 12 noon and 9 P.M. besides tea and tiffin at the usual hours."

UNIVERSAL HISTORY ARCHIVE / UNIVERSAL IMAGES GROUP / GETTY IMAGES

NH Palkar, too, is unambiguous in his assertions that Golwalkar was indeed the author of *We* and that this book carried the core of Sangh's ideology. "Around this very time, 'We or Our Nationhood Defined', the book that he authored, was published," he writes. "It was a written manifestation of Doctorji's"—Hedgewar's—"concept of pure nationalism."

By Palkar's account, Golwalkar presented a detailed analysis of concepts such as the nation, religion and culture in *We*, and exposed what he saw as the Congress's policy of appeasing Muslims. Palkar justifies Golwalkar's prescription of total assimilation or ethnic cleansing to deal with minorities in India. "He writes that there are only two options available for people of foreign race," Palkar writes. "One, they accept the national culture of dominant race and get assimilated with it, and two, they should stay here on the permission of the state and leave the country as and when the permission is withdrawn." Palkar adds that this "is the only proper way to look at the question of minorities. This is also the justified answer to this question. This alone can ensure stable and peaceful national life."

Referring to MS Aney's foreword to Golwalkar's book, Palkar writes,

> This analysis of the problem of minorities was backed also by Aneyji … Today we have tasted the bitter fruits of 'state within state' because of overlooking the logical solution to this problem which was suggested in those days. History has proven the analysis of Guruji right.

Aney, a Nagpur-based Congress leader, was a friend of Hedgewar. In his foreword to *We*, he expresses his sympathy for the idea of a Hindu nation. Despite Palkar's claim that he endorsed Golwalkar's analysis, Aney does not go to the extent of openly backing Golwalkar's Nazi-influenced ideas of a so-called final solution for minorities. "I find that the author in dealing with the problems of the Mohmeddans' place has not always borne in mind the distinction between the Hindu nationality and Hindu sovereign State," he writes. "Hindu Nation as a sovereign State is entirely a different entity from the Hindu nation as a cultural nationality. No modern State has denied the resident minorities of different nationalities rights of citizenship of the State if they are once naturalised either automatically or under the operation of a Statute."

Palkar, in his biography, talks about Golwalkar translating *Rashtramimansa* into English, but he categorically says that this project was totally distinct from *We*. "It would not be inappropriate

OPPOSITE PAGE: Golwalkar's plan to be führer backfired after Mohandas Gandhi was assassinated in 1948 by a member of the RSS, which led to a government crackdown on the organisation.

THIS PAGE: Since Golwalkar pursued a spiritual image, he took care to appear averse to publicity, often melodramatically refusing to be photographed.

to mention about another incident of that year," he writes, describing 1938. "The famous revolutionary Shri Babarao Savarkar's book *Rashtramimansa* was to be translated into English from Marathi." The translation was to be overseen by Vishwanathrao Kelkar, a relative and close associate of Babarao.

According to Palkar, the senior RSS leader PB Dani suggested to Kelkar that Golwalkar be tasked with the translation. Kelkar, he writes, called Golwalkar "to his residence and asked him about his willingness to do the translation. Guruji gave his assent and took the book and the blank sheets of paper and returned home." Palkar adds that Golwalkar completed the translation in just one day, but, for some unknown reasons, "the translation was never published and it kept lying at Kelkar's residence."

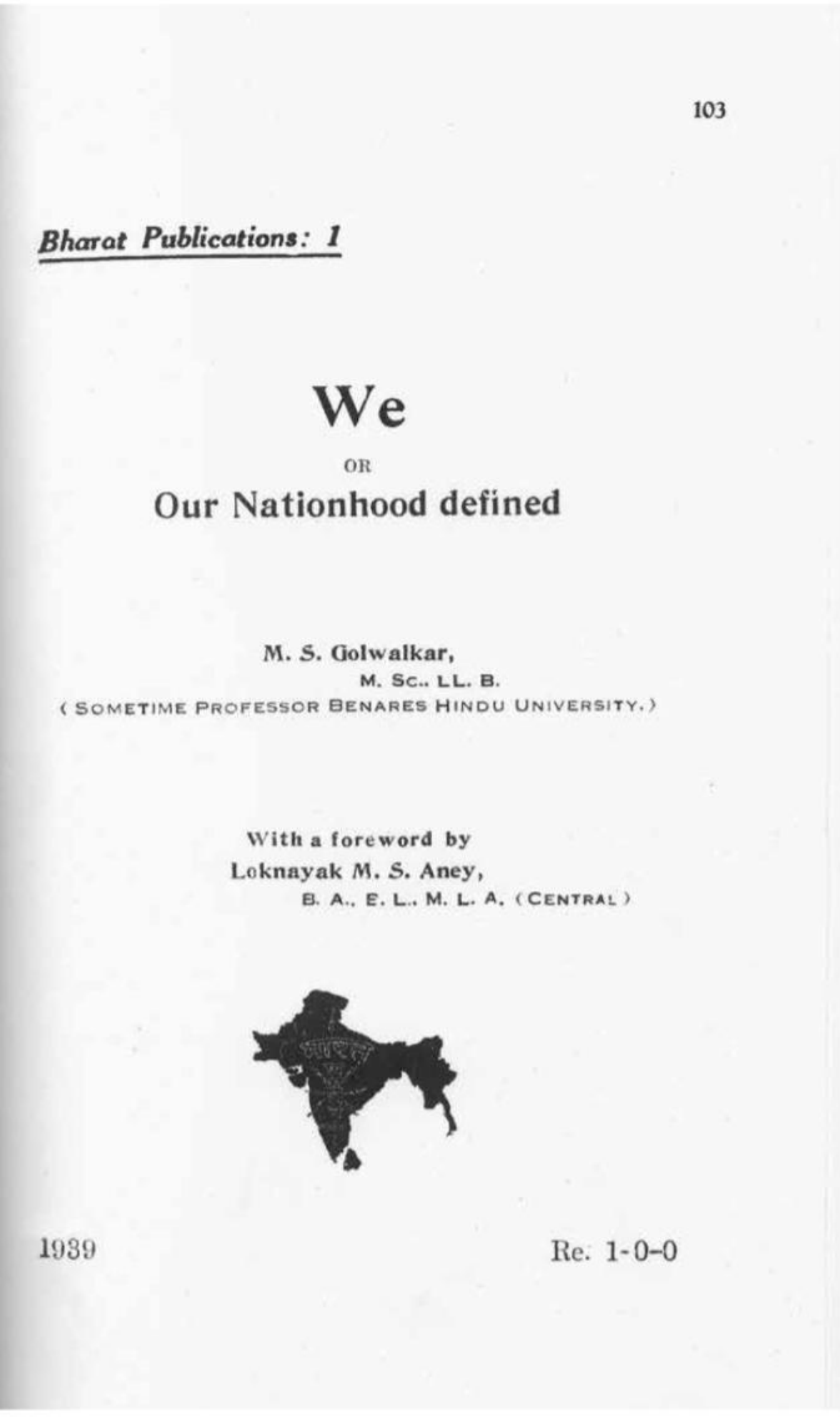
Golwalkar, too, mentions this in the preface to *We*, when he writes of the English translation of *Rashtramimansa* and asks readers to wait for the upcoming book "for exhaustive study of the subject"—but he does so without revealing that he himself was the translator. He did not know at the time that the English translation would never see the light of the day.

GOLWALKAR DID NOT repeat the lie he told in May 1963 in his subsequent speeches and writings. Perhaps, in view of the many discrepancies it carried, he did not want to over-emphasise the claim to avoid provoking an independent evaluation of its validity. After his death, in 1973, the Sangh made several efforts to deny the influence of Nazism on its own ideology. Some of its supporters maintained complete public silence on *We*, while others offered feeble arguments supporting Golwalkar's claim that he did not write the book.

The first authorised biography of Golwalkar published after his death, Hari Vinayak Datye's 1984 book *Arti Alok Ki*, remains silent on *We* and its authorship. It does not mention Golwalkar's 1963 disclaimer either. That Datye could have been unaware of *We* or the controversy around it is impossible to believe. His association with Golwalkar went back to before the book's publication. "The first time I got the opportunity to meet Guruji was in 1938," Datye writes. "He was then in charge of the annual Officers' Training Camp." PG Sahasrabuddhe, another long-time colleague of Golwalkar, shared Datye's caution while writing his own account of the departed leader. His biography, *Shri Guruji: Ek Jeevan Yajna*, appeared in 1987, and took a similar approach of not mentioning anything related to *We*.

The RSS seemed to gain in confidence once the Bharatiya Janata Party formed a ruling coalition

BELOW: RSS apologists have uncritically promoted Golwalkar's claim, even though *We* contains the following details about its author: "M.S. Golwalkar, M. Sc., L.L.B. (Sometime Professor Benares Hindu University)."



103

Bharat Publications: 1

We

OR

Our Nationhood defined

M. S. Golwalkar,
M. Sc., LL. B.
(SOMETIME PROFESSOR BENARES HINDU UNIVERSITY.)

With a foreword by
Loknayak M. S. Aney,
B. A., E. L., M. L. A. (CENTRAL)

1939 Re. 1-0-0

to take charge of the central government in 1998. The Sangh finally began developing an official position on *We*.

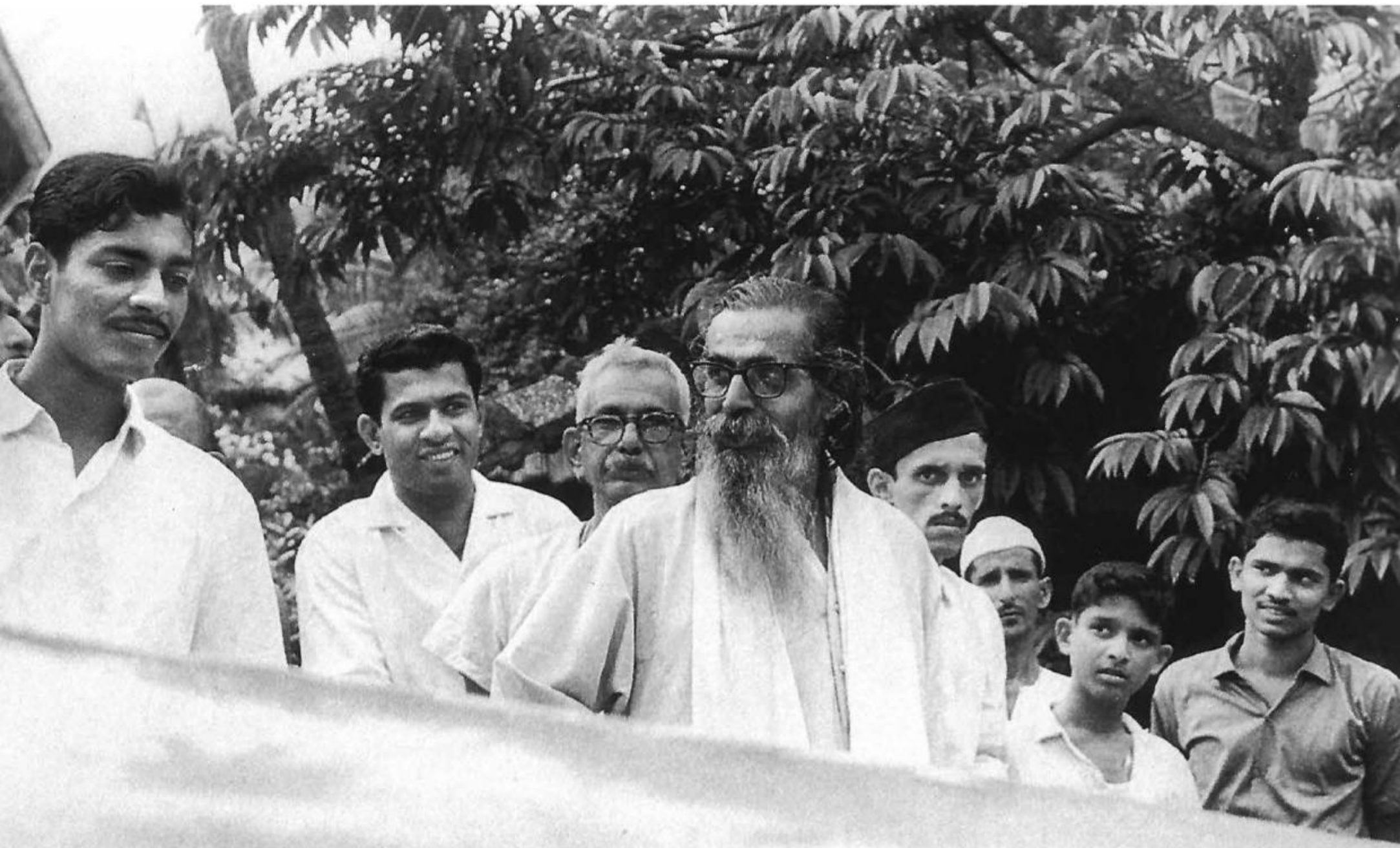
In his critique of Golwalkar's book, which also reproduces its full text, the political scientist Shamsul Islam notes an interesting episode that took place in parliament days after the BJP-led government was sworn in. During the confidence-motion debate on 28 March 1998, the former prime minister Chandra Shekhar brought up the fascist ideas contained in *We*. "He was perturbed by the fact that the BJP government was following the diktat of the RSS whose ideological guru had authored the above book," Islam writes. LK Advani, the home minister in the new government, "intervened to say that the author of the book, Golwalkar, had distanced himself from the book and had declared to have no relation with it. Of course, he was unable to present any corroborative document."

In its 31 May 1998 issue, the RSS mouthpiece *Organiser* carried an article by David Frawley, a US-based RSS apologist. "Those who call the RSS fascist emphasise one book to prove it, *We or Our Nationhood Defined*, by B.S. Savarkar [sic], the elder brother of the great Indian revolutionary Veer Savarkar," it reads. "Golwalkar, who later became the leader of the RSS in 1940, translated the book in 1938."

This was a blatant distortion of fact, for *We* contains the following details about its author: "M.S. Golwalkar, M. Sc., L.L.B. (Sometime Professor Benares Hindu University)." In the preface, Golwalkar acknowledges his authorship. He writes, "It is a matter of personal gratification to me that this maiden attempt of mine—an author unknown in this line—has been graced by a foreword by Loknayak M.S. Aney."

In his 2006 booklet *Shri Guruji and Indian Muslims*, the RSS ideologue Rakesh Sinha takes a rather circuitous way to disassociate Golwalkar from *We*. He blames "Islamic scholars and secularist social scientists" for questioning Golwalkar's 1963 claim and thereby creating confusion regarding the book's authorship. "In spite of his open and liberal perspective on the question of nationalism and secularism, he has been treated most unfavourably by Islamic scholars and secularist social scientists," Sinha writes. "Selective and out of context citation of his views is unparallel in Indian academic. They largely quoted a treatise *We or Our Nationhood Defined* which was published in 1939. A baffled and elusive domestic and international politics certainly influenced the contents of the book."

Sinha argues that *We* "neither represents the views of the grown Guruji nor of the RSS.



He himself acceded this when he revealed that the book carried not his own views but was an 'abridged version of G.D. Savarkar's work Rashtra Mimnsa [sic]'." Thus Sinha, like Frawley, insists that Golwalkar must be believed because he said so. He says nothing about the discrepancies that riddle the RSS chief's claim, nor produces any evidence that supports it.

"Within the Sangh, among swayamsevaks, there is no confusion about who has written the book," the journalist Hartosh Singh Bal writes in his profile of Golwalkar, which appeared in the July 2017 issue of *The Caravan*. On Bal's visit to Golwalkar's family home at Ramtek, which now serves as a memorial as well as the Sangh's district headquarters, a swayamsevak named Rahul Wankhede took him on a tour of the first floor of the building. "I've heard this is where *We* was written," Wankhede told Bal. "Guruji wrote it over one night, in a single sitting." ■

ABOVE: Through the latter part of his life, Golwalkar had to exercise especial restraint in light of the overwhelming presence and popularity of Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, who took an avowedly secular approach to governance and enjoyed wide acceptance across communities, including Hindus.

COMMISSIONS OF UNTRUTH

The politics of India's ad-hoc judicial inquiries

MANPREET ROMANA / AFP / GETTY IMAGES

ESSAY / POLITICS

SHUBHANKAR DAM

ON 14 SEPTEMBER 2020, a 19-year-old Dalit woman was sexually assaulted in the millet fields of Bul Garhi, a village in the Hathras district of Uttar Pradesh. Relatives towed her paralysed body to the nearby Chand Pa police station. Speaking with a gnashed tongue, the victim narrated her ordeal and named the alleged perpetrators, but the policemen on duty disputed her account and rebuffed her plea for assistance. The family admitted her to the local medical college in nearby Aligarh. With public rage soaring, the authorities registered a case and recorded the victim's statement. A delayed forensic examination—conducted some eight days after the alleged crime—did not reveal evidence of rape, the police claimed.

With her vitals wavering, the family removed the victim to Delhi's Safdarjung Hospital. A day later, on 29 September, she died. Her autopsy listed "injury to the cervical spine by blunt-force trauma" and "rape and strangulation." The family never received her body. Instead, the police bussed it back to Bul Garhi, cordoned off the locality and hustled through a cremation without her relatives present.

A long view of judicial commissions suggests the need for caution. Historically, these commissions' partisan workings and findings tell of retired judges being faithful to the state, not the facts.

These events fuelled national headlines. Officials denied any wrongdoing. The Uttar Pradesh government invited the Central Bureau of Investigation to conduct a probe, but opposition parties dismissed this as a charade. The communist parties demanded an independent judicial inquiry. The Bahujan Samaj Party, the Congress and the Samajwadi Party urged having a Supreme Court or High Court judge monitor the probe. The Bhim Army, a Dalit rights organisation, insisted that a retired Supreme Court judge investigate the police.

The family demanded the same. "We want an investigation to be held under a retired Supreme Court judge," they told reporters. Later, responding to an offer of state compensation, the victim's father told a BBC reporter, "I want justice, I don't want money. I'm a daily-wage labourer, I earn two hundred rupees a day, I can live on fifty rupees. But I just want justice."

India's superannuated judges are an engaged lot. Their sunset activities incite a mob of clashing reactions, but one line of employ, as overseers of fact-finding commissions, commands a rare consensus. Over the past year alone, politicians, lawyers and civic groups have demanded that judges interrogate the snooping charges involving the Pegasus spyware, the grisly riots that felled 53 people in Delhi, the policy failures in handling the COVID-19 pandemic and the resultant migrant crisis, an alleged police conspiracy against protesting farmers during Republic Day celebrations in the national capital, and much more. Someone, somewhere, is always hankering for grey judges to affirm facts and proclaim truths. This obsession, an inheritance of caste and a cankered state, is a stubborn feature of Indian public life.

But a long view of judicial commissions suggests the need for caution. Historically, these commissions' partisan workings and findings tell of retired judges being faithful to the state, not the facts. Venerating them as India's final purveyors of truth diminishes our civic networks of governance. Reversing the trend will mean expanding the circle of public faith to include us, the people of India. The Bul Garhi victim's family needs a larger mosaic of characters it can trust to identify facts, honour truth and enforce accountability. And so do we all.

INDIA'S SUPREME COURT JUDGES retire at the age of 65, but they rarely disrobe into anonymity. Instead, most labour in new sites. The market offers them an olio of options.

Some judges pick careers in academia and authorship. Judicial training institutions—the National Judicial Academy in Bhopal and its state clones—employ them as experts. Many national law schools enlist them as lecturers. The National Law School of India University in Bengaluru, the National University of Juridical Sciences in Kolkata and others have bestowed chair professorships on several judges. A few aspire to sweeter positions in foreign varsities. Others attempt monographs, textbooks and annotated commentaries. The monographs, mostly on constitutional law, can fill a library, but only a handful are classics of legal scholarship. Commercial publishers also recruit retired judges as the editors of law textbooks and practitioner commentaries, some of them vintage titles that require constant revisions. Often, uncredited authors do the hard grind—the real editing and updating—but pedigree names on rent grace the front pages. This sly deal suits publishers and judges alike: one hawks more books, the other banks away parasitic royalties.

In early 2005, as an undergraduate law student, I received a call from India's (then) most prominent law publisher. The owner wanted to meet in person. Would I like to edit a leading textbook

on administrative law, he asked. The book was nearly twenty years out of date, he explained, and required rewriting. His offer came with some fine print: I would do the work, and the preface would acknowledge my "assistance," but only a judge would be named as the book's editor or new author. I declined.

A second crop of judges stay engaged with court matters. In its sunrise years, the Supreme Court rehired some superannuated judges for brief periods—including Chandrasekhara Aiyar, Vivian Bose and Venkatarama Aiyyar. Article 128 of the Indian Constitution permits this, but the practice has expired. Since the 1990s, no retired judge has been reappointed to the Supreme Court.

Things are a bit different in the high courts. In April 2016, various state chief ministers and high-court chief justices adopted a resolution to deploy retired judges in their respective courts. TS Thakur, then the chief justice of India, supported the motion. Reengaging such judges, he told the gathering, could help shrink India's monstrous pile of pending cases. But nothing happened. Then, in April 2021, the Supreme Court dispatched a cargo of orders in response to a public-interest litigation empowering—directing—high-court chief justices to re-induct retiring judges for an additional two or three years.

The Supreme Court has invented other ways to enlist retired judges. In some cases, the court involves them in matters under litigation. In 2016, for example, the court appointed Vikramjit Sen, a former judge, to arbitrate in a complex series of claims between property developers and home buyers. In 2021, as an interim measure in another matter, the court appointed an "Overseeing Committee" under the former judge BN Srikrishna to administer the Gokarna Mahabaleshwar Temple in Karnataka.

In other instances, the court has commissioned judges to proffer policy advice or monitor the conduct of certain parties. In 2012, a surgeon named S Rajaseekaran petitioned the Supreme Court to act against a giant public assassin: roads. Archaic laws, he alleged, were strewing Indian streets with needless bodies. The court instituted a committee on road safety to audit the corpus of motor-vehicle laws, under the retired judge KPS Radhakrishnan. The mandates of other such committees have included improving the capital's savage air pollution, disinfecting the administration of the Medical Council of India and, most dazzlingly, rebuilding the Board of Control for Cricket in India.

A third cohort of judges pursue lucrative careers in private consulting. (A few engage in human-rights activism and advise NGOs.) Corporate executives and public-sector units voraciously consume chamber advice—written briefs, obtained at a fee. These opinions can assist in crafting legal strategies and act as insurance policies: officials can point to them to shield themselves against charges of dereliction or corruption later on. And then there is arbitration, a method of dispute-resolution commercial houses crave to bypass India's lazy legal system. The March 2021 roster of the Indian Council of Arbitration, a leading agency in the field, listed over thirty former Supreme Court judges among its empanelled arbitrators.

But arbitral career graphs vary wildly: some judge-arbitrators relish astounding success, others stare at empty desks. What explains the contrast? The legal corridors are rife with rumours of enterprising judges and lawyers courting one another from the judges' days on the bench.

A fourth set of former judges resume public service on tribunals—specialised official bodies with simpler procedures than the courts, but with similar functions. Today, they form an entire menagerie: the Armed Forces Tribunal, the Central Administrative Tribunal, the Food Safety Appellate Tribunal, the Industrial Tribunal, the National Green Tribunal, the Telecom Disputes Settlement and Appellate Tribunal, and many more. Their original promise was to deliver fast and friendly justice beyond overburdened courtrooms. But governments have kept tribunals in a stranglehold, closely monitoring their workings and appointments to them. (The Supreme Court ordered a new arrangement in November 2020 to guarantee tribunals greater independence, and reiterated its view this July.) Of the hundred or so Supreme Court justices to retire between 2000 and 2020, roughly forty resettled in tribunals. These appointments are symbiotic: they prolong judges' public careers and lend the forums judicial legitimacy.

A final corps of retired judges savour a buffet of discretionary positions. Some are political or advisory, others constitutional, and others still are international. Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru inaugurated the practice of inviting judges to this banquet. In 1952, he appointed Saiyid Fazl Ali, one of India's original Supreme Court justices, as the governor of Orissa. Ali was still a judge when Nehru announced his decision, and ethics enthusiasts grumbled about the indiscretion. But Nehru persisted, feting Ali and other judges with a bevy of post-retirement offers. He made them governors and ambassadors, placed them in university administrations and tasked them with running advisory commissions and investigative ones.

These early retirees did it all: reorganise states into linguistic units (Ali), settle boundary disputes (MC Mahajan), probe ministerial malfeasance (SR

PREVIOUS SPREAD:
Protestors demand a judicial inquiry into the Delhi Police's conduct in the Batla House encounter in 2008. Someone, somewhere in India, is always hankering for grey judges to affirm facts and proclaim truths.

OPPOSITE PAGE:
T Muthuswamy Iyer became the first native Indian judge on the Madras High Court in 1878. Judging, especially in the Hindu consciousness, has enjoyed an abiding association with Brahmins. Since colonial times, India's modern courts have imitated ancient custom.

Das), interrogate bureaucratic bungling (SK Das), investigate corporate corruption (Vivian Bose) and tender policy recommendations (Venkatarama Aiyyar). The trend has since only accelerated, and Nehru's inaugural practice is now the republic's abiding habit.

These post-retirement pursuits provoke a wide spread of reactions. The first two—academic and court assignments—do not elicit much suspicion, but questions remain, particularly over the latter. Why do the courts enlist some former judges for ad hoc roles but not others? We do not know: the courts rarely reveal their mind. The third option—chamber practice and arbitration—stirs occasional disquiet in legal circles but seldom so much as makes the news. In contrast, tribunal placements incite frequent storms of commentary. Some denounce such appointments, anxious about governments employing them as lures to erode the independence of the judiciary. Others demand them: only retired judges, they reason, can protect the independence of tribunals. The fifth path, of discretionary positions, rouses especially trenchant reactions. The commentariat bitterly disfavours retired judges taking up political posts as governors, ambassadors or nominated members of parliament. But even it embraces—in fact, *insists* upon—judges' shepherding investigative commissions of civic importance. Something about retired judges, some intangible trait, makes them universally assumed to be ideal ushers of these commissions.

THE JUDICIARY MOTORS ON TRUST. It has nothing else. Writing in 1788, Alexander Hamilton, among the original signatories of the American constitution, christened it the "weakest" branch of government. The legislature controls the "purse"—the country's finances—and "prescribes the rules" that regulate citizens. The executive commands the "sword of the community," the military. But the judiciary, Hamilton noticed, has "neither FORCE nor WILL," only judgment. Popular obedience to it rests on faith: people must believe in judges' impartiality.

Unsurprisingly, international codes of judicial conduct and the Indian Supreme Court's own Restatement of Values of Judicial Life, adopted in December 1999, belabour the role of trust. They eulogise a bouquet of values—independence, impartiality, integrity, propriety, equality and diligence—and exhort judges to exemplify them in everything they do. The mission: engender trust in judges and the judicial process.

But India has long witnessed a form of trust transfer: judges are trusted, but so are *retired* judges. In office and out of it, they appear the same: repositories of honour and honesty, ethics and excellence, tact and sound temperament. Note how retired Supreme Court and High Court judges demand, and are forever accorded, the dignity of the title of "Justice." High judicial status in India is invisibly permanent: once a judge, *always* a judge.

This is the handiwork of the caste system. Judging, especially in the Hindu consciousness, has enjoyed an abiding association with Brahmins. While community elders mediated local disputes, lingering disagreements that reached higher forums involved Brahmins as judges. In princely courts, the officiating priests also performed adjudicative duties. They acted as royal advisors, jurisconsults or judges. In 1772, the East India Company's first governor general, William Hastings, unwittingly codified these customs when he directed English judges that, "in suits regarding inheritance, marriage, inheritance, caste, and other religious usages and institutions, the laws of the Koran, with respect to Mohammedans, and those of the Shaster with respect to the Gentoos, shall be invariably adhered to." So pandits and shastris, specialists in sacred texts, sat as advisors and referees on colonial benches and co-signed verdicts. (Maulvis did the same in disputes involving Muslims.) This cemented the Brahmins' old role in the new legal system. As JDM Derrett, the one-time Tagore professor of Hindu law at the University of Calcutta, put it, "Non-Brahmans admitted that Brahmans were the expounders of law, and that the Hindu religion required obedience to the *dharmasastra* which the Brahmans alone knew."

This imperial union of British judges and Brahmins was dissolved in 1864. The latter no longer sat as jurisconsults on benches. But as the Anglo-Indian legal system expanded, the upper castes, especially Brahmins, assumed lower-level judgeships and populated key roles in the emerging legal professions. The cultural memory of Brahmins as judges deepened as modern courts imitated ancient custom.

The new republic, in turn, enacted this memory with gusto. Till 1990, over forty percent of Supreme Court judges were Brahmins. The figure has since dipped slightly, but remains vastly disproportionate to their demographic representation in India.

"All significant concepts of the modern theory of the state are secularized theological concepts," the German philosopher Carl Schmitt once wrote. All significant practices of the modern Indian state, to adapt Schmitt, are secularised caste concepts. Their long histories scaffold the cultural practices of the administrative state and reveal themselves in how the bureaucracy organises, expresses and engages itself. The inner workings

of the judiciary vividly demonstrate this. Today's judges are yesterday's Brahmins—and though not all modern-day judges belong to the Brahmin caste, they are all *performing* Brahmins. Just like a Brahmin is always a Brahmin, a judge, too, is always a judge.

This reverence made opposition politicians demand that retired judges probe the Delhi riots of 2020. This reverence inspired the Bharatiya Janata Party to urge an investigation led by a retired judge into the ethnic cleansing of Hindus in the Kashmir Valley in the 1990s. This same reverence prompted the Communist Party of India (Marxist) to call on retired judges to review the government's ruinous sale of telecom spectrum in 2010.

But do the facts justify this oddly uniform—and culturally informed—trust?

GOVINDA PARAMESWARAN PILLAI / WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

CONSIDER THE CATALOGUE of commission findings involving retired (or sitting) Supreme Court judges who investigated politicians in the last five decades. (I exclude commissions set up to recommend policies, and include only that information which is already public knowledge.)

On the afternoon of 31 October 1984, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's Sikh bodyguards murdered her. Immediately, Delhi groaned like a slaughterhouse as organised mobs hunted Sikhs down as ostensible vengeance. In 1985, Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, Indira's son, appointed Ranganath Misra, a Supreme Court judge, to probe the carnage. Misra's report hinted at police apathy, avoided naming apparatchiks and absolved the Gandhis' Congress party of any culpability.

In May 2000, the governing National Democratic Alliance, an anti-Congress coalition, commissioned another investigation. GT Nanavati, a former Supreme Court judge, headed an examination of the "sequence of events" in 1984 and "any lapses or dereliction of duty" among officials. Unlike Misra, Nanavati indicted Congress leaders for instigating the assault: among them Jagdish Tytler, Sajjan Kumar and HKL Bhagat. But his report came out in February 2005, five years after his original appointment. By then, the NDA had succumbed to a surprise electoral defeat and the Congress had resumed power. Except Kumar, none of those named nor others who had stood above them in the party structure faced any criminal consequences.

Elsewhere, Nanavati was more forgiving of the political leadership.

In the early hours of 27 February 2002, coach S-6 of the Sabarmati Express, on the return leg of its route connecting Ahmedabad to Ayodhya, erupted in flames. The train was stationed at Godhra Junction that morning, a few hours shy of its final destination in Ahmedabad. Almost five dozen Hindu pilgrims were burnt to death. Grisly violence erupted across Gujarat a day later. At least a thousand, if not several thousands, died in communal attacks—most of them Muslims.

The next month, Narendra Modi, the state's chief minister at the time, appointed KG Shah, a retired high-court judge, to investigate the inferno and the riots. Two months later, critics goaded

Modi into expanding the probe panel. He inducted Nanavati. The investigative commission's first tranche of findings arrived six years later. (Shah had died by then, and Akshay Mehta, another retired judge, had joined Nanavati.) The train fire, the panel concluded, was a pre-meditated crime: local Muslims had masterminded a plot to kill Hindus. The judges absolved Modi, his ministers and their minions of any complicity or negligence in the ensuing riots. The findings advantaged Modi, who was dogged by persistent allegations that he had a hand in the bloodshed.

The Congress's curriculum on picking the right judges to unearth the right findings, hand out the right exonerations or fuel the right innuendos is no longer a secret. Indian politics is teeming with graduates proficient in finding suitable candidates.

Another commission proclaimed contrary facts. In August 2004, Lalu Prasad Yadav, the railway minister at the time and Modi's political foe, entrusted UC Banerjee with a parallel investigation into the train burning. Banerjee, a retired Supreme Court judge, filed his interim report in January 2005. The victims had died in an accidental fire that began inside the coach, he wrote, and no Muslim masterminds or mobs were involved. This finding, conveyed just before state elections, suited Yadav.

Notice the mounting pattern. Findings vary by judges: selecting the right ones begets the right reports. Predictably, the archives are crawling with commissions that engineered expedient findings.

In July 1985, opposition parties delivered a 53-page charge sheet to Rajiv Gandhi against Haryana's Congress chief minister, Bhajan Lal. It contained a feast of allegations: corruption, fraud, nepotism, profiteering and more. Gandhi appointed Jaswant Singh, a retired judge, to conduct an inquiry. In just under a month, Singh had a 150-page exoneration ready. The report scrubbed Gandhi's ally free of all stains.

When it came to Gandhi's foes, it was a different story. In 1989, Gandhi was accosted by a chorus of corruption charges against himself and was desperate to deflect attention. He invited Kuldip Singh, a Supreme Court judge, to probe his political rival Ramakrishna Hegde. Singh's swift report dutifully indicted Hegde on several counts. Gandhi had lost his prime-ministerial office by then, but the findings still embarrassed Hegde and he vacated his post at the Planning Commission.

Allies-turned-adversaries, too, suffered similar fates. In 1986, the finance

BEDI / AFP / GETTY IMAGES

minister, VP Singh, hired an American firm to investigate foreign-exchange violations by Indian firms. Singh had not consulted with Gandhi on this, and his government and the Congress party, fearing embarrassing disclosures, turned on the finance minister. His party colleagues alleged that Singh had compromised India's national security by enlisting a firm with purported links to the Central Intelligence Agency.

Gandhi named two Supreme Court judges, MP Thakkar and S Natarajan, to investigate the controversy. Working from their residences and away from the public eye, the judges conducted a skewed probe. The pugnacious lawyer Ram Jethmalani, representing one of the parties in the case, refused to address them with the usual honorific. "You are now not Lordships for me as you don't sit as judges of the Supreme Court," he told Thakkar and Natarajan. "Sorry, I will address you only as commissioners." The judges' report, a withering attack on Singh, surprised no one, and was just what Gandhi needed to arrest the dimming of his political star. By the time it was out, Singh had abandoned the Congress and become Gandhi's arch adversary.

Another example: In April 2004, the United Nations secretary general Kofi Annan invited Paul Volcker, the former chairman of the US Federal Reserve, to probe corruption in the Oil-for-Food Programme in Iraq. Volcker's 2005 report identified the Congress and aides of Natwar Singh, a high-ranking party politician, among the beneficiaries. To pacify an outraged opposition, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, a loyal Congress man, appointed RS Pathak to reinvestigate Volcker's India-related findings. Pathak, a former chief justice of India, absolved the Congress of any wrongdoing without summoning party leaders or demanding any explanations. He concluded that Natwar Singh had improperly enabled *others* to secure corrupt deals, but found no evidence against him personally. The opposition later claimed that the fix was in: Natwar Singh needed to fall so that the Congress could remain standing. Pathak, in effect, had delivered what the party needed.

Again, in August 2005, Assam's chief minister, the Congress's Tarun Gogoi, solicited an investigation into an eerie sequence of killings under the state's previous administration. He entrusted KN Saikia, a former Supreme Court judge, with the proceedings. In the 1990s, the United Liberation Front of Asom, a secessionist group, had unleashed bloody mayhem. By 1998, a spate of counter-killings began, as masked gunmen fired midnight bullets into relatives, friends and sympathisers of suspected ULFA militants. (They also killed journalists and activists.) The Saikia report on the "secret killings" fingered PK Mahanta, Gogoi's political adversary and the state's chief minister at the time they occurred.

Occasionally, commissions do not directly profit their architects, but judges still find ways to serve their agendas. On 2 January 1975, a bomb ripped through the Samastipur train station in Bihar. It grievously wounded LN Mishra, the railway minister in Indira Gandhi's cabinet, and he died the next day. Mishra was under a cloud of corruption charges regarding his fundraising for the Congress, and his assassination, the opposition claimed, was a profitable loss for Gandhi. She put KK Mathew, a Supreme Court judge, in charge of assessing the "facts and circumstances pertaining to the explosion." The resulting report, delivered after Gandhi had declared the Emergency that June, did not identify the alleged killers, but Mathew devoted a chapter to denouncing Gandhi's adversary Jayaprakash Narayan and his populist movement against her government. The "climate of violence created by the agitation as well as the allegations of corruption made during it against Mr. Mishra provided an atmosphere congenial to the perpetration of the crime," the judge surmised. In implicating Narayan's movement, Mathew retrospectively excused Gandhi's constitutional coup.

The Congress's curriculum on picking judges—the right judges to unearth the right findings, hand out the right exonerations or fuel the right innuendos—is no longer a secret. Indian politics is teeming with graduates proficient in finding suitable candidates.

In the early 2000s, undercover reporters filmed the president of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party, political aides of the defence minister and senior staff in the defence ministry accepting wads of cash as part of a sting to expose corruption in defence deals. Immediately, political parties wrangled for mileage. The defence minister, George Fernandes, resigned, and Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee ordered a probe. SN Phukan, a retired Supreme Court judge, examined the allegations. Predictably, he exonerated Fernandes. The opposition spokesman Jaipal Reddy, of the Congress, blurted out the truth: "Phukan was handpicked by the government. He will naturally give a clean chit to the minister."

A decade later, the parties swapped roles: a Congress-led administration picked a judge and the BJP complained. In 2011, Kapil Sibal, the telecom minister in the United Progressive Alliance government, convened a one-man commission to investigate alleged corruption in the allocation of telecom licences and 2G spectrum between 2001 and 2009. Shivaraj Patil, a retired Supreme Court judge, landed the assignment. His report absolved A Raja, Sibal's predecessor in the Congress-led

OPPOSITE PAGE:
The 1984 Delhi pogrom left thousands of Sikhs dead. A judicial inquiry sanctioned by the Congress government of the time absolved the party of responsibility. A later inquiry installed by an anti-Congress coalition indicted Congress leaders.

THIS SPREAD:
The Nanavati-Shah commission (below) and UC Banerjee commission (opposite page) were both appointed to investigate the Godhra train burning. Their contrary findings aligned with the contrary needs of their respective political creators.

alliance, but fingered several government officials from the earlier UPA administration, which had ruled from 2004 to 2009, and the BJP-led government that had preceded it. Arun Shourie, the telecom minister in that government, blasted Patil's report, calling it a "complete misrepresentation" designed to help the UPA. "A handpicked judge gives a report to the government which is so convenient," he railed. "It is a perversity." Some years later, the BJP leader Arun Jaitley relitigated the same charge against Patil, insisting that Sibal had selected a judge of "his choice" to artificially unearth an "NDA scam."

All parties know their partisan shades of black on the bench, but pretend otherwise.

A DISTRESSING AXIOM governs India's ad-hoc commissions. Penned by retired (or sitting) judges, their reports patronise the partisan interests of those who install them. The commissions resemble vending machines: insert charges against their creators, and the reports exonerate; insert charges against the opposition, and the reports implicate.

The pattern is problematic *even if* the findings seem justified. Consider the string of inquiries Prime Minister Morarji Desai initiated in 1977, after voters ousted the Congress from power in Delhi. Rejecting demands for an omnibus "Nuremburg-type trial," Desai commissioned eight piecemeal investigations into the Emergency-related excesses of his predecessor, Indira Gandhi, and her consiglieres. Retired Supreme Court judges headed all of them. These included the famed Shah commission (against Gandhi herself), the Gupta commission (against her son Sanjay Gandhi and his financial vandalism in the Maruti company), the Reddy commission (against Gandhi's confidant and defence minister Bansi Lal) and the Grover commission (against Congress chief ministers and their abuses of power). Each commission found against its subject(s). But the incriminating reports were also wins for Desai: he got just what *he* wanted.

Only seldom do commissions disobey the axiom. Consider one of Desai's inquiries that revisited the puzzling Nagarwala affair. On 24 May 1971, one RS Nagarwala impersonated Indira Gandhi's voice over the phone, and later sped off with sixty lakh rupees from the State Bank of India's high-profile Parliament Street branch in Delhi. Then came a train of odd events: Nagarwala's conviction in a trial that lasted ten minutes, his death in prison not long after, the death of the investigating officer in a car crash. Desai trusted P Jaganmohan Reddy, a retired Supreme Court judge, with a probe. Reddy identified "incontrovertible facts"

SHAILESH RAVAL / THE THE INDIA TODAY GROUP / GETTY IMAGES

SHAILESH RAVAL / THE THE INDIA TODAY GROUP / GETTY IMAGES

and "several lacunae" but refused to speculate based on them. The available facts, he concluded, provided no basis to fasten the crimes or coincidences to Gandhi. It was a rare report: a commission against an adversary that delivered an exoneration.

Another disobedient report also had a Desai link. In July 1978, malfeasance charges swirled around relatives of Desai and his home minister, Charan Singh. In April 1979, the prime minister appointed CA Vaidialingam, another retired Supreme Court judge, to interrogate the claims. Delivered in January 1980, the Vaidialingam report probed 41 charges and condemned Desai's son and daughter-in-law, as well as Singh's wife, on seven counts. The commission had stung its creator. But these are honourable exceptions: rogue vending machines of a bygone era. The well-oiled ones have rarely malfunctioned since.

India's judicial commissions of inquiry appear scripted. Their appointments calm an initial frenzy, misdirect opposition attention, lend ministers precious time, offer retired judges a pretence of official duty and cost the exchequer untold sums. In conversations with the American political scientist George Gadbois, several judges of the Supreme Court fessed up to the crooked *origins* of some commissions. Ministers, they said, planted "motivated witch hunts aimed at harassing political rivals." But the pattern of friendly findings suggests that some *outcomes*, too, have been crooked—rendering judges character assassins for hire. So much for the ambassadors from virtue-land, the repositories of ethics and excellence.

This self-evident truth should make Indians distrust such commissions. Instead, an illusion of integrity has them riveted. Neglecting the glaring facts, Indians adamantly venerate retired judges and inflate their dignity. At times, their faith has a delicious hint of irony. In September 2020, the lawyer Colin Gonsalves, writing in the *Indian Express*, castigated the Supreme Court's refusal to probe corruption charges against judges. He asked: "Why can't the truth be told? Why can't names be mentioned? Why can't details be spoken of? Why can't testimonies of senior lawyers who have practised in the [Supreme Court] for decades and know particulars … be recorded?" And who should do the recording? "A commission of retired judges of impeccable integrity," Gonsalves suggested. He did not say how to identify them. Another commission of retired judges, perhaps? Even opposition parties who know better (for they have their vending machines, too) cannot escape the lure of this mysterious faith.

Perhaps Indians should dispute this cultural consensus, disavow the inherited trust and experiment with a radical alternative: bet on retired judges a bit less and on themselves a bit more.

MODERN DEMOCRACIES are indirect systems: citizens govern themselves through representatives. The latter legislate, execute policies and officiate over people's lives. Periodic elections are central to this setup. They ensure delegates stay loyal to citizens' interests and preferences. During the late twentieth century, scholars enshrined this form of indirect democracy as the

ultimate elixir, the pinnacle of institutional design for self-government.

Not anymore. Bridled by a fleet of electoral pathologies—voter inertia, ignorance, bias, elite capture, corruption and more—historians, philosophers and political scientists are scouting for alternate modes. The philosopher Alex Guerrero and others have suggested retooling an old Athenian motor to power democracies afresh. They call it lottocracy. (Other names for it include "sortition" and "demarchy.") Guerrero's version imagines multiple single-issue assemblies addressing specific topics: healthcare, climate change, consumer protection, higher education and so on. Three hundred randomly selected individuals would populate each one, with each "lottocrat" serving a three-year term. Guerrero's framework regards such service as voluntary, but lottocrats would enjoy financial incentives and accommodations for their families and work schedules if they agree to serve. Also at their disposal: expert assistance, stakeholder inputs and community feedback as they propose, debate and enact legislation.

The *idea* of lottocracy is not alien to India. In 1993, a constitutional amendment incorporated Panchayati Raj, India's aboriginal form of self-government, as a third tier of government administration. Voters elect local administrators every five years, but one-third of panchayat seats are reserved for women. (Some states have upgraded this to half.) Each electoral cycle, specific seats are randomly identified for reservation. This is lottocracy at the seat level. A stack of econometric research on the effectiveness of such randomised reservations (including by the Nobel laureate Esther Duflo) suggests the system has worked well.

I propose the lottocratic principle for fact-finding commissions: engage a randomly selected panel of citizens to probe the next riot, the next police botch-up or the next act of political malfeasance. Using ordinary citizens as fact-finders is a common practice. Many countries have it, and India, too, had it once: the jury system. Jurors hear counsels, then deliberate over and pronounce on the guilt or innocence of the accused. India's last jury assembled in Calcutta in January 1973, to try two persons for committing homicide and grievous hurt. By a majority vote, the jurors acquitted them both. About fifty years later, India must reinvent jurors as commissioners. In some respects, commissioners have more to do than jurors: identify victims, interrogate witnesses, inspect evidence, write reports. In other respects, they have less: they do not decide the guilt or innocence of any parties. (Commissions only find facts; they cannot deliver legal judgments.)

KEYSTONE / GETTY IMAGES

Implementing lottocratic commissions requires agreement on some details: how to select citizens (from the electoral rolls, perhaps), how many (possibly ten to fifteen), from where (maybe a mix of locals and non-locals). Other issues require attention, too. Compensation: should commissioners be paid, and if so, how much? Independent expert assistance: how should it be made available? Security: how should commissioners be reasonably protected? These matters are debatable, but not difficult to settle.

THE IDEA OF NON-EXPERTS as fact-finders also has an intriguing parallel in the physical sciences. In June 2014, the *Oxford English Dictionary* elevated "citizen scientist" into its lexicon, some twenty years after the British sociologist Alan Irwin and the American ornithologist Rick Bonney separately proposed the term. Irwin, in particular, was motivated by a desire to open

up "science and the scientific processes to the public." Citizen scientists are amateurs involved in producing data and knowledge. They assume many avatars: data collectors, interpreters, problem definers, even data analysts. Some collaborate with (professional) scientists, others toil under the DIY flag. They have pioneered discoveries and inventions in many areas. The California-based Counter Culture Labs, for example, is attempting to produce a generic and cheap insulin, aided by an army of amateur geneticists. Increasingly, citizen (or civic) scientists command a presence in ecology, geology, microbiology, ornithology, oceanography and beyond. With support from national academies, international organisations, dedicated journals and prestigious academic conferences, they are forging a global movement. If ordinary citizens, despite fears about bias and data contamination, can do science, can they not do civics too?

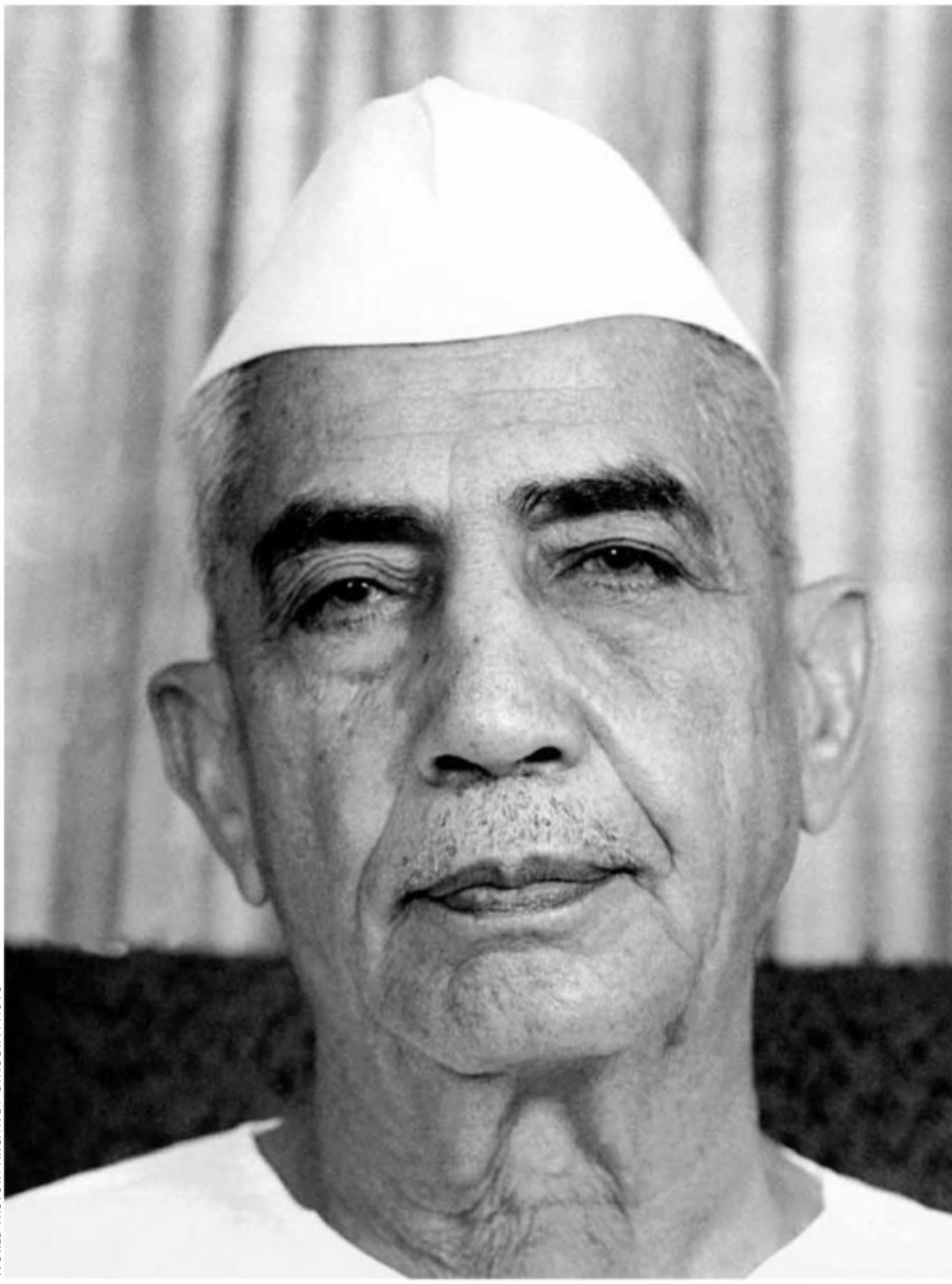
Today, fact-finding commissions in India are under judicial monopoly. We trust them because all other governing institutions are awash with distrust. This poverty of credibility has skinned our democracy to its bones. The republic is a jamboree of elected posts, appointed officials, hustling businesses, voluntary networks and striving citizens. Branding everyone except judges (and, incidentally, the army) as "compromised" is a ruinous pursuit: India will lose if it runs down the prey.

Entrusting the task of identifying facts, and the truth, to ordinary citizens—divided by caste and creed, politics and ethics, region and religion—is an ambitious experiment in democracy, but one the republic urgently needs. Atomised realities and sectarian values are gripping India fast. Indignant citizens are burrowing into snug silos: private spaces with room only for those who think and act (and vote) like them. And these angry hideouts are stoking our instincts for war and blood, as the anthropologist Thomas Hansen suggests in *The Law of Force: The Violent Heart of Indian Politics*.

Making Indians engage with, argue about and agree on facts despite obvious differences may rekindle local trust. These interactions can cultivate civic synergy. They can (re)affirm the idea of living with—and amid—difference. This is no idle theory. In his acclaimed *Ethnic Conflict and Civic Life*, the political scientist Ashutosh Varshney illustrated the murderous fallout of depleted community ties. He analysed three pairs of Indian cities: one city in each pair had a history of communal violence, the other had a history of harmony. Marrying rich ethnographic insights with archival data, Varshney showed how layers of inter-ethnic engagement contributed to observing peace despite provocations. Cities with strong, sustained individual interactions (in mohallas, markets and the like) and organisational networks (community centres, trade unions, grassroots educational, trade and professional associations) excelled at communal peace. Engagement amid diversity matters. It has saved lives—it can save our democracy, too.

Some scepticism is understandable. Can citizens probe fairly while living out their rainbow of individual identities? Can they resist the sly pressures partisans will rain down on them? Can they resume normal post-commission lives? I cannot foretell. But we must try. Today, judicial commissions are predictable vending machines. Anything that renders outcomes unpredictable is progress. A commission of randomly selected citizens guarantees such unpredictability. It is assuredly better than today's commissions of untruth. ■

THIS SPREAD:
Prime Minister Morarji Desai (opposite page) appointed a retired judge to probe corruption allegations against his relatives, and also relatives of his home minister, Charan Singh (below). The commission's findings stung its creator—a rare and bygone occurrence.



WORLD HISTORY ARCHIVE / DINODIA PHOTO

Battling the Wave

Healthcare efforts fighting
the COVID-19 crisis in rural India

PHOTO ESSAY / HEALTH

PHOTOGRAPHS AND TEXT BY **HARSHA VADLAMANI**

PREVIOUS SPREAD: 24 MAY 2021
Kavita Kushwaha, 28 years old, left latex gloves filled with hot water next to her 80-year-old father Dadanram Kushwaha to soothe his bedsores. At the time, he was in the COVID-19 ICU run by Sangwari at the Government Medical College Hospital in Ambikapur, Chhattisgarh. He died later that night.

ABOVE: 08 MAY 2021
A temporary barricade put up at a coronavirus-control checkpoint at Sirpur, along the state border between Telangana and Maharashtra.

OPPOSITE PAGE: 18 MAY 2021
A person running a high temperature and suspected of having COVID-19 is brought to the Jan Swasthya Sahyog hospital at Ganiyari in Bilaspur, Chhattisgarh.

SANGWARI AT GOVERNMENT MEDICAL COLLEGE HOSPITAL, AMBIKAPUR
SURGUJA, CHHATTISGARH
PREMNAGAR, SURAJPUR,
CHHATTISGARH
JHARKHAN
MADHYA PRADESH
JAN SWASTHYA SAHYOG,
GANIYARI, BILASPUR,
CHHATTISGARH
BINIYA, SURGUJA,
CHHATTISGARH
MAHAN TRUST,
MELGHAT,
AMARAVATI, MAHARASHTRA
DHARNI, MELGHAT,
MAHARASHTRA
CHHATTISGARH
NAGPUR
ODISHA
SHAHEED HOSPITAL
DALLI RAJHARA,
BALOD, CHHATTISGARH
MAHARASHTRA

LEFT: 25 MAY 2021
Sivil Sarjan Paikra, 60 years old, on the right and Sachin Kumar Gupta, 39 years old, to the left. They are teachers who were part of a contact-tracing team in Batauli in Surguja, Chhattisgarh.

OPPOSITE PAGE TOP: 11 MAY 2021
Belabai Dhurve, 42 years old, and Kalabai Maravi, 50 years old, both health workers trained by the JSS, stand outside a COVID-19 patient's home during their door-to-door monitoring in Bamhani inside the core zone of the Achanakmar Tiger Reserve in Mungeli, Chhattisgarh.

"SAABUN HAI?"—Do you have soap? Thirty-year-old Shyamkali Baiga, knew the drill. She brought out a bright-green bar of soap, held it close to her nose and confirmed that she could not smell it. Savni Baiga, a health worker, briefly took her eyes off the list of symptoms she was ticking off on a sheet and nodded in acknowledgement.

As the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic swept through India, looking at the horrific visuals from Delhi and other cities, I wondered about the situation in villages. Rural India has been the focus of my reporting for the last thirteen years, and I knew its fragile healthcare systems would struggle to handle the pandemic. In early May, after fully recovering from the virus myself, I set out on a motorbike to document its impact on rural areas in Chhattisgarh and Maharashtra, through the work of doctors working in low-resource settings in those regions. My first port of call was the Jan Swasthya Sahyog hospital, a facility with a hundred beds and two operation theatres, in the village of Ganiyari, in Chhattisgarh's Bilaspur district. Founded in 2000 by a group of doctors who quit their careers at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences in Delhi, to work on healthcare in the region, the hospital and its three sub-centres serve an estimated 1.5 million people in more than two thousand villages.

The villages in this region largely dodged the virus during the first wave, but it did not take long after 5 April—when the first case during the second wave was reported—for the numbers to shoot into the hundreds. By the third week of April, outpatient numbers at the JSS hospital had fallen to a fraction of what they used to be before the pandemic, and all non-emergency procedures were paused. As travel restrictions kicked in, patients from villages inside and on the fringes of the Achanakmar Tiger Reserve, around thirty-five kilometres away, as well as from Madhya Pradesh—both major catchment areas for the hospital—could not reach the hospital.

Savni is one of the JSS's two health workers in Bahaud, a village of about four hundred people in the Mungeli district of Chhattisgarh. Her responsibilities before the pandemic included monitoring patients for a range of illnesses, working on ante- and postnatal care, as well as referring those who needed hospitalisation to Ganiyari, around sixty kilometres away. Nowadays, she sports a mask, gloves and face shield, and, armed with a pulse oximeter and hand sanitiser, spends most of her time monitoring patients from the village for COVID-19 symptoms. Shyamkali and her four children are now among the village's 16 active COVID-19 cases and are under

BELOW: 06 JUNE 2021
A traveller gets himself tested for COVID-19 at a testing camp on the Maharashtra-Chhattisgarh border in Rajnandgaon, Chhattisgarh.

home isolation. When we spoke in May, Savni's most pressing concern was a neighbourhood, home to half the village's population, where people had refused to allow her to monitor them for symptoms or get them tested. There was a great deal of resistance to getting tested in the villages, according to Harendra Singh Sijwali, a 35-year-old community-health coordinator at the JSS. "Few ever turned up at testing camps organised in the villages, though I myself got tested over twenty times to encourage others to do so," he said. "There was a strong fear of social boycott from the rest of the village. They were afraid others won't come near them and threatened the health workers who turned up to test them."

By early May, the JSS stopped insisting on tests in the 72 villages where it runs its community-health programme. Instead, its health workers, often working together with midwives and *mitanins*, as accredited social-health activists are called in Chhattisgarh, walked door-to-door to record people's symptoms. Anyone who displayed the virus's common symptoms or failed the smell-your-soap test, as Shyamkali Baiga did, were advised to self-isolate and given a medicine kit that cost ₹30. Between May and July, JSS health workers monitored 3,100 cases, of which 2,937 recovered at home, 141 were referred to the hospital in Ganiyari and 32 died.

In late May, I visited a small rural-health clinic a few hours north-east of Ganiyari, in the thickly forested region of Surguja. It was run by Sangwari, a collective of young doctors that came together this January. They are advised by Dr Yogesh Jain, a co-founder of the JSS who recently left the organisation. Their weekly clinic held on Fridays at Biniya coincides with a weekly haat that brings people from surrounding villages to the area. However, following the lockdown, the clinic's monthly patients fell from 115 in March to 35 in

ABOVE: 09 JUNE 2021
Binda Bai, 50 years old, holds a nebuliser for her 50-year-old husband Sankuram Uike. He was admitted to Shaheed Hospital in Dalli Rajhara in Balod, Chhattisgarh, after complications arising from the consumption of alcohol immediately after vaccination as well as a relapse of tuberculosis.

OPPOSITE PAGE TOP:
23 MAY 2021
Doctors attend to Mithau Ram, 45 years old, who was admitted in a critical condition, in the ICU at the Government Medical College Hospital in Surguja.

OPPOSITE PAGE BOTTOM:
15 MAY 2021
A technician does a chest X-Ray for Bhaskar Prasad Yadav, 47 years old, in the COVID-19 ward at the JSS hospital in Ganiyari.

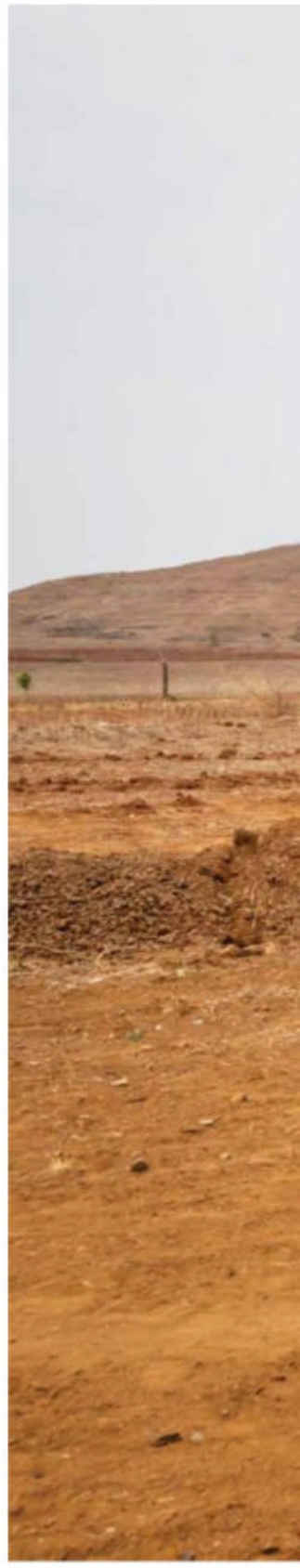
10

5
70
AU TIMOBIL

May. The primary focus of the Sangwari doctors' energies, however, was an ICU unit with twenty beds for COVID-19 patients at the Government Medical College Hospital in Ambikapur, around sixty kilometres away, which functions as the main tertiary-care centre for the districts of Koriya, Surajpur, Balrampur, Jashpur and Surguja. Sangwari was offered the responsibility to run the ICU for a period of three months during the second wave and, after signing a memorandum of understanding with the hospital, took charge on 17 May. A team of 12 doctors and 17 nurses, many of them with previous training or work experience from the JSS, ran the ICU.

Even as doctors elsewhere refrained from physical contact with patients, the doctors here interacted with them freely. "There was a loss of emotional connect, as patients don't see the doctor's face or feel our touch as we communicate from a distance. We wondered if it really helped," 35-year-old Chetanya Malik, one of the doctors at Sangwari, explained. "We were all vaccinated or had recovered from COVID-19, so we figured we could safely touch the patients as long as we took precautions. Patients who were afraid that no one will come talk to them, touch or check on them in a COVID-19 ward, told us these interactions made them feel better." Attendants were allowed to be with them all the time. Some attendants sat, or even slept, on the same bed as the patients, as long as they were masked.

The ICU treated 74 patients in May and June, of which 28 died. Many patients were admitted with comorbidities, including diabetes, kidney and heart disorders, and had advanced stages of hypoxia—low blood-oxygen levels—as a result of the delay in treatment due to a hesitation towards getting tested. Low testing rates, difficulty in accessing healthcare and lack of transportation contributed to the deaths. In the absence of public transport, patients had to rely on seven-seater autos and jeeps to take them to the hospitals, which cost between a thousand and four thousand rupees. The pandemic had hit incomes hard. In villages covered by the JSS, some families did not even have soap or toothpaste at their homes to produce for the smelling test; a health worker sprayed hand-sanitiser for them to smell instead. Cut off from institutional healthcare, many villagers relied



OPPOSITE PAGE: 18 MAY 2021
Family members of 22-year-old Kiran Singh, who died recently of COVID-19, walk to a tank for a ritual bath in Junapara, Bilaspur.

ABOVE: 31 MAY 2021
Manohar Patil, 50 years old, holding the leash of a goat, walks with his daughter Jamuna More and son-in-law, Suhas More, and a female family member after offering prayers at an ashram run by Bhanlal Jawarkar. They claimed Jawarkar had cured Jamuna of oral cancer two years ago, by prayer, after doctors had given up on her. They walked to a spot under a tree where the goat was to be slaughtered and served at a feast, in Dadida, in the Melghat region of Amravati. They undertake this ritual to offer thanks for the good health of the family.

LEFT: 17 MAY 2021
A nurse relaxes in front of an air cooler in the COVID-19 ward at the JSS hospital in Ganiyari.

BELOW: 24 MAY 2021
Ghanshyam Prasad, 56 years old, and Anand Das, 51 years old, sleep in the ICU run by Sangwari at the Government Medical College Hospital. Das's wife, Suhanu, lies by his side.

RIGHT: 23 MAY 2021
Ashik Parvez, 28 years old, plays a prayer on his mobile phone for his father Nabi Khan, 50 years old, who was critically ill with COVID-19 and admitted to the ICU at the Government Medical College Hospital in Ambikapur.

BELOW: 10 MAY 2021
The COVID-19 ward at the JSS hospital in Ganiyari.

BELOW: 31 MAY 2021
Dr Ashish Satav checks on a 60-year-old patient named Sonaji Savalkar, who tested positive for COVID-19 at the MAHAN Trust's hospital in Utavali, Melghat. The plastic sheets used when Satav visited the patient were intended to prevent the hospital's only senior doctor handling COVID-19 cases from catching an infection.

OPPOSITE PAGE: 19 MAY 2021
An old woman, suspected of having COVID-19, was left with no medical attention in a room in Jakad Bandha in the Achanakmar Tiger Reserve. Health workers from the JSS convinced her son to bring her later that evening to the hospital, seventy kilometres away in Ganiyari, but the family decided to take her back after being told that her condition was serious. "We're leaving it up to god," they said.

on quacks, herbal medicines and faith healers. At the Premnagar community-health centre in Chhattisgarh's Surajpur district, though, Sumer Singh, a health worker, told me in May that he had been waiting for over eleven days to draw up a list of ten people over the age of 45 to give the vaccine to, so that no dose went to waste.

In late May, I crossed the Vindhyas into the south-western Satpura mountain ranges. I went to Melghat, a region in Amravati, Maharashtra, nine hundred kilometres away from Ambikapur. There, I followed the work of Dr Ashish Satav of the

One night, at MAHAN's Mahatma Gandhi Tribal Hospital in Utavali, a 32-year-old patient named Devanand Gurvekar was admitted in a critical condition, which the doctor on call suspected could be due to a fungal infection following a COVID-19 recovery. Not willing to risk the fungus infecting the hospital's ICU—the only such facility in the three hundred or so villages that make up the Melghat region—the doctor referred him immediately to the district hospital in Amravati. The hospital was battling COVID-19 with minimal staff and resources, with

MAHAN Trust, a non-governmental healthcare organisation. A woman I met, Sojar Chintaram Bilavekar, spent six thousand rupees on treatment for fever, by a quack doctor, who told her she had typhoid. But when it did not subside even after many days, she travelled to the sub-divisional hospital in Dharni, where she tested positive for COVID-19. She spent 19 days there, 16 of them on oxygen support. As she returned home in an ambulance, with her daughter accompanying her, the worry of how the neighbours would react—whether they would even talk to her—weighed heavily on her mind.

practical measures for self-preservation. Satav, the only doctor in the region with an MD degree, wore three masks as well as a face shield. When he visited patients in the ICU, a plastic sheet was pulled over their faces to prevent aerosol transmission.

Jaishree Navakhe, the taluk health officer for Dharni, talked about how many in the Korku community had been apprehensive of vaccinations. "There were rumours floating around of how the vaccine might give them the virus, cause death, handicap or infertility," she said. "People also suspected that the vaccine was a means for the

LEFT: 18 JUNE 2021
Ruchika Behera, 26 years old, pins a black band on a fellow nurse, 35-year-old Sarita Yadav, as the medical staff at Shaheed Hospital joined a nationwide protest by medical professionals against attacks on them by patients and their relatives.

RIGHT: 27 MAY 2021
Members of a wedding band catch up on some sleep before their next event at a wedding outside Dindori in Madhya Pradesh. The state banned weddings in May, since they were believed to be a major reason for the spread of COVID-19 in villages. Local marriage-registrar offices were ordered to not issue marriage certificates for couples who married during this period and to even file cases against them.

LEFT: 15 MAY 2021
Farmers returning from the fields, in Khargi Khurd, Bilaspur. The village was declared a containment zone after about eleven COVID-19-related deaths were reported from the village of three thousand five hundred people. The villagers said that only one testing camp had been conducted on April 15, where only symptomatic people were tested. The rest had to travel to Kota, ten kilometres away, for tests.

ABOVE: 11 MAY 2021
A vehicle carrying a JSS medical team crosses the Maniyari River en route to Nivaskhar, deep inside the Achanakmar Tiger Reserve.

BELOW: 30 MAY 2021
Sojar Chintaram Bilavekar, from the Korku community, takes a ritual purification bath with neem, tulsi and bel leaves upon reaching home after spending 19 days in hospital in Melghat, Amravati. Sixteen of these were spent on oxygen support. Bilavekar first approached a quack in Kalamkhor, who misdiagnosed her with typhoid. But the fever did not subside after many days. She then went to the sub-divisional hospital in Dharni, where she was diagnosed with COVID-19 and admitted immediately.

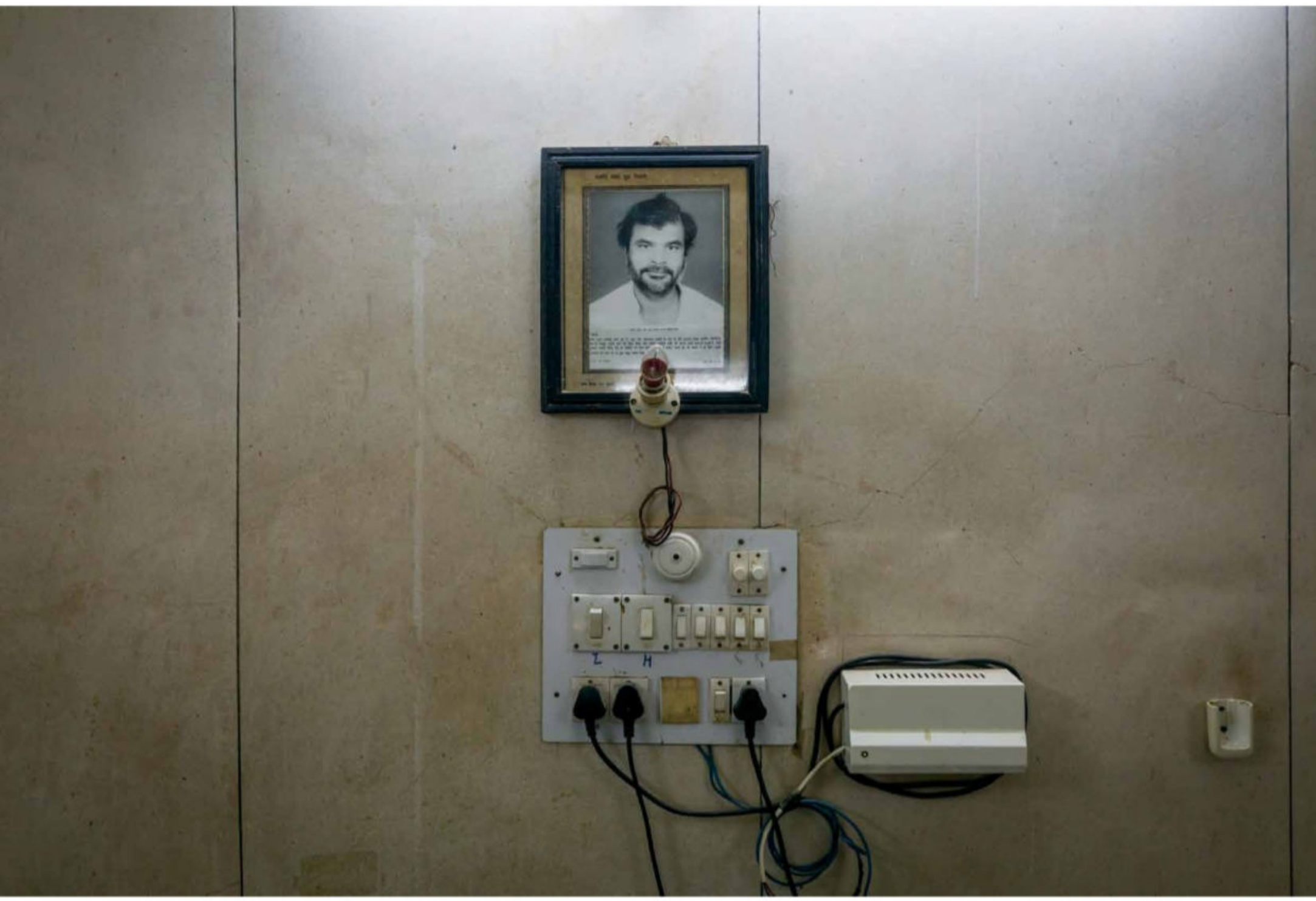
LEFT: 30 MAY 2021
A 50-year-old prisoner from the Surguja district jail, admitted at the Government Medical College Hospital in Ambikapur with COVID-19 symptoms, is shackled to his bed in the isolation ward.

government to finish off the poor and reduce the population." In Melghat, the administration responded by producing informative videos in the Korku language and having them shown in villages. By the end of May, there were a few villages with 100-percent vaccination rates.

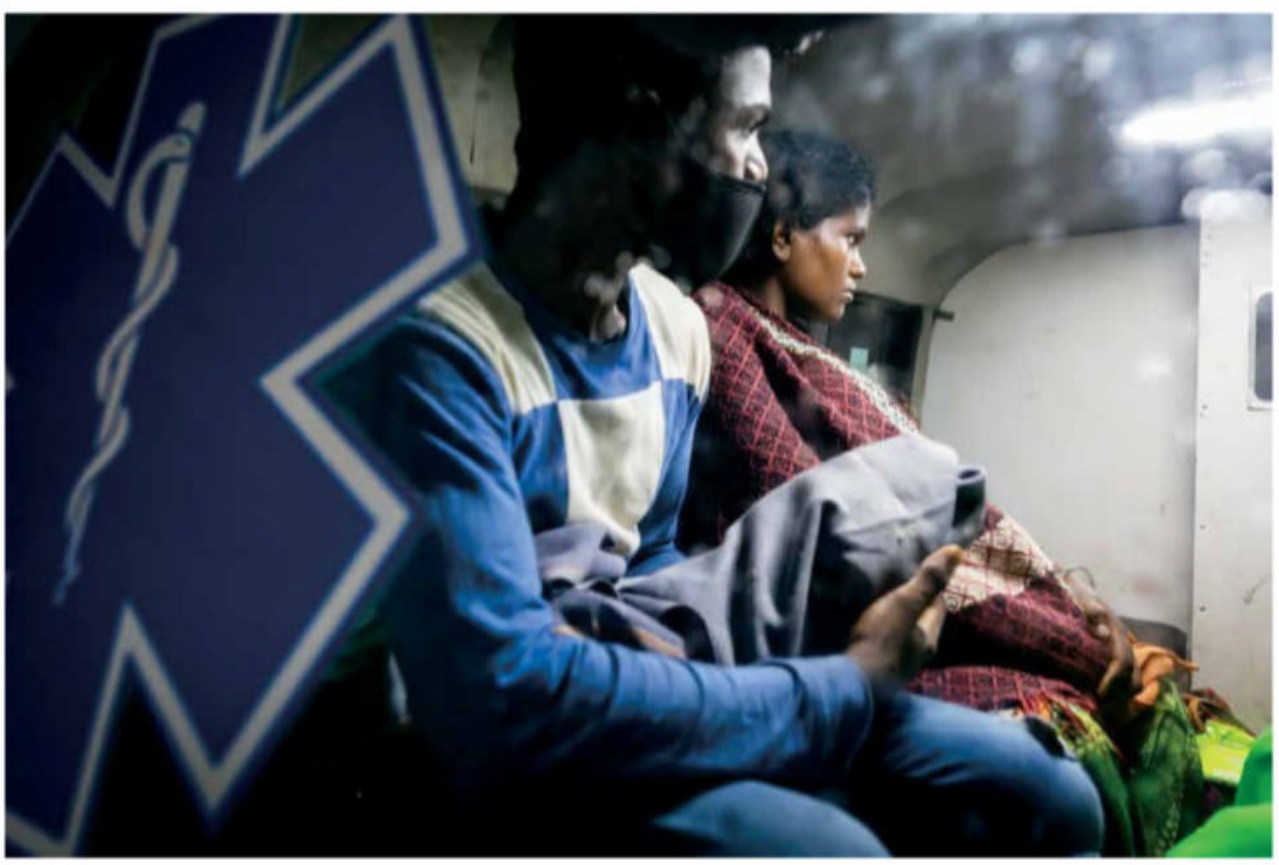
By the time I made it to Shaheed Hospital in Dalli Rajhara, in Chattisgarh's Balod district, in the second week of June, cases were already on the wane. Buses were still off the roads, but, as restrictions on inter-district movement were lifted, patients who had not been able to access hospitals despite their ill-health started queuing up. The hospital was the oldest of all facilities I visited, built in 1983 by mine workers (who continue to run it) after Kusumbai, vice-president of the workers' union, died in 1979 for lack of medical care. It gets its name "Shaheed," or martyr, from the 11 protesting miners who were killed by police firing on 3 June 1977. It is now headed by Saibal Jana, who was one of the doctors that helped set up the facility.

As the district hospital in Balod was saturated with cases, many were being referred to Shaheed Hospital, twenty-five kilometres away. "We were treating patients from a radius of a hundred kilometres," Vidit Panchal, a 26-year-old doctor who handled much of Shaheed's caseload during the pandemic, told me. The hospital's COVID-19 ward, with 50 beds, treated 560 people between April and June, of whom 90 died. "Sixty-five

BELOW: 11 JUNE 2021
A portrait of Shankar Guha Niyogi, the activist who unionised the mine workers of Dalli Rajhara, hangs in the operating theatre at the hospital in Dalli Rajhara in Balod, Chhattisgarh.



BELOW: 02 JUNE 2021
The family members of 32-year-old Devaram Gurvekar, who was suspected of having contracted a fungal infection after COVID-19, listen as a doctor from the MAHAN trust's hospital in Utavali advises them to take him immediately to Amravati for better treatment.



BOTTOM: 14 JUNE 2021
Jogeshwar Vishwakarma, 21 years old, holds the dead infant of his 25-year-old sister Surekha Bai as they leave for their village of Gidhali from Shaheed Hospital in Dalli Rajhara in Balod, Chhattisgarh. The infant, delivered in a PHC closer to their village, was brought to the hospital with complications arising from drinking amniotic fluid but died before the family could arrange for money for a private ambulance to a better equipped hospital at Durg, 85 kilometres away.

to seventy percent of our patients were brought in on the fifth day of symptoms, after the distress had set in, which led to a large number of deaths," he added.

Panchal is now in charge of the post-COVID OPD that runs every Friday. People come to see him every day, with post-virus complications that range from breathlessness to nightmares. On 16 June, the last three patients in the COVID-19 ward at Shaheed Hospital had breakfast and left the hospital. Fewer cases were coming in, so the hospital decided the beds could be used to treat other patients. The hospital staff immediately removed the bed linen, locked the doors to the ward and turned on a fumigator filled with formaldehyde. Panchal asked me to share a photo of the locked up ward I took on my phone. Four days later, he posted the photo along with a long note on Facebook.

"The number of patients we lost in April-May exceeded twice of what we lose in an entire year. The number of people we had to turn away exceeded the numbers we treated. What made it worse was knowing that the person I am denying admission was not going to get admission elsewhere too ... There was less time to treat, even lesser to mourn and literally no time to let it all sink in," he wrote.

This project was funded by the National Geographic Society.

ABOVE: 02 JUNE 2021
The body of Sunita Bilavekar, 18 years old, cocooned in plastic wrap, lies in a pickup truck at the MAHAN Trust hospital. She died of COVID-19 complications minutes after being brought to the ICU. Her body was placed all night in a storage area of the hospital, which does not have a cold-storage facility, after the family was denied permission to take her body back due to COVID-19 protocols. She was later cremated at the family's farm.

/ LITERATURE

The Uses of Laughter

PG Wodehouse and the comic tradition

SHASHANK KELA

{ONE}

FEW POPULAR WRITERS can have received quite as much critical praise in their own lifetimes as PG Wodehouse. Yet not long ago, the critic Philip Hensher could remark that "apart from England ... the only country in the world which truly loves and understands Wodehouse is India." This affinity is supposedly embodied in Indian English, said to be based (rather like Wodehouse's prose) on "English grammar at its most formal" and "the vivid and racy idiom in un-English contexts." This might be persuasive if it weren't for the difficulty of proving that Indian English actually exists. English takes different forms in different parts of the country, but none ever possessed sufficient consistency and verve to develop into a recognised dialect. There was a time when fluent speakers favoured the Received Standard—the educated dialect of southwestern England—but American English has outstripped it in popularity and even the range of accents is now flattening out.

What Hensher calls Indian English is largely a literary invention. In *Kim*, Kipling uses Hurree Babu as a comic foil, to make fun of educated Indians, by having him jumble different registers in a way that might be expected of someone who learns English from books in school instead of speaking it at home. At the same time, he takes care to make him a sharply delineated figure in his own right. Other writers were to adapt this patois with varying degrees of success: Wodehouse uses it in *The Luck Stone*, an early adventure serial rediscovered and published in 1997. But I doubt if this tells us anything useful about his own prose.

Back in 1945, George Orwell argued that non-English readers of Wodehouse were apt to be led astray in judging his intentions. As example, he quoted an Indian nationalist of his acquaintance who believed that Wodehouse was a satirist of the English upper classes. Fortunately, times have changed: no contemporary reader would need to be told that Wodehouse shows no political awareness at all, or that the world of his novels had come to an end by the First World War (if, indeed, it ever existed).

Hensher's article is a sustained defence of Wodehouse's literary qualities: "one of the greats ... [t]he insistent trivia of his concerns should not detract from the untiring mastery of his style, the extravagance of his English." He draws attention to Wodehouse's linguistic register, exemplified in a rare gift for dialogue. To Christopher Hitchens, another of his champions, "simile and metaphor provide ... much of the energy of Wodehouse's narration."

But there's also a cult of Wodehouse—a tiresome one, as Hitchens pointed out. The unstinting praise of his admirers tends, if anything, to obscure his actual qualities. He has been described as the greatest comic writer of the twentieth century, but no one has made any attempt, as far as I know, to place his achievement within a comic tradition that stretches long before (and after) him. The effect of doing this is to cast fresh light upon Wodehouse the writer.

{TWO}

PELHAM GRENVILLE WODEHOUSE was educated at public school: his alma mater was Dulwich College, in a leafy London suburb. If not quite in the top tier of those exclusive, expensive institutions to which the sons of the English upper classes were sent, it was not near the bottom either. Like all of them, it fostered a formidable esprit de corps. When Wodehouse decided to become a writer, he turned instinctively to this experience. His first books, published at the very beginning of the twentieth

HULTON ARCHIVE / GETTY IMAGES

century, were school stories, light in treatment but ostensibly realistic: in them, the surface aspects of the public-school code (fair dealing, loyalty, self-effacement and so on) are taken for granted.

To Plum (as he was called), his years in school "were like heaven." Ronald Knox, a noted Catholic convert and apologist who went on to translate the Bible, was to remember his time at Eton in much the same way. Others found the experience more unsettling: for them, school meant soul-crushing loneliness, cruel hazing and initiation into sex (traumatic or happy). Wodehouse's near contemporary Patrick White, who spent some grey years in Cheltenham College, remarked that its inmates were "brought up to consider visible emotion weak and shameful." This certainly applies to Wodehouse's fictional schoolboys whose rites of passage are exciting but never unpleasant.

The plots are built around sporting contests (cricket, rugby, boxing); the heroes are sportsmen, pitted against boys or masters who reject the code or fail to uphold it. In the best of these stories (*Mike at Wrykyn* and *Mike and Psmith*, originally written as a single book in 1909), the eponymous Mike awakes, after various vicissitudes, to a sense of his own responsibilities. Their main distinction lies in the clarity of the writing. The dialogue and details are convincing and naturalistic—if you discount psychological realism, but this Wodehouse never aimed at.

ABOVE: PG Wodehouse has been described as the greatest comic writer of the twentieth century.

Soon afterwards, he turned his hand to what might be called comic romances. Orwell calls this Wodehouse's American period on the grounds that the settings are chiefly American, but the label seems unduly limiting. The plots are banal and sentimental. A witty young man encounters a plucky young woman; after sundry misunderstandings (usually in the form of an unsuitable attachment to someone else), they get married. This basic framework supports humourous subplots and running gags, with a growing cast of comic characters to populate the scenery.

At this stage of his career, Wodehouse relied upon exposition as much as dialogue. Romance, comedy and realism are held together in unstable balance: *The Little Nugget* (1913) parodies the adventure story in its tale of kidnappers pursuing an American schoolboy; *Psmith, Journalist* (1915) omits the romantic plot in favour of a social problem (slum housing in New York); *Jill the Reckless* (1920) tries and fails to attain some kind of psychological depth. The Psmith novels form the high water-mark of this period: their hero gave Wodehouse's comic gifts full scope, without any need for extraneous padding.

In *Leave it to Psmith* (1923), he succeeded for the first time in weaving comedy into (rather than around) his central plot. By 1925, Wodehouse had perfected the template for the cycle of books that commences with *The Inimitable Jeeves* (1923): their chief innovation is a hero who spends much of his time trying to *avoid* marriage. In this, Jeeves acts as Bertie Wooster's saviour. The love interest is usually relegated to sub-plots featuring Bertie's friends and ex-flames: the effervescent Bingo Little appears in *The Inimitable Jeeves*, and the lovelorn pair of Gussie Fink-Nottle and Madeline Bassett in *Right Ho, Jeeves* (1934) and *The Code of the Woosters* (1938). The last vestiges of realism are abandoned by transforming these lovers into figures of fun.

Other books return to the template of the comic romance, attenuating the sentimentality and heightening the comedy. The romantic entanglements in *Summer Lightning* (1929) and *Heavy Weather* (1933) are more conventional and therefore less successful: by contrast, *Uncle Fred in the Springtime* (1939) succeeds—much like *Leave it to Psmith*—in transforming them into undiluted comedy.

{THREE}

BORN IN 1881, Plum grew up in the Victorian environment of late-nineteenth-century England, with the shadows scrubbed out. If they darkened his life, he refused to acknowledge them. His father worked as a magistrate in Hong Kong: at the age of two, Plum was sent to England along with his older brothers and given into the care of a complete stranger. When he was five, they were enrolled in a boarding school, their holidays being spent with various relatives. A few years later, he entered Dulwich College, where "he acquired, for the first time, a degree of permanence and stability." School became for him a surrogate for family life: it helped that he was good at sports and a bright if dreamy scholar. His "closest tie" was with his older brother Armine, who went on to enjoy a successful academic career in India (where he joined the Theosophists, becoming president of the Theosophical College in Benares and editing their magazine *The Herald of the Star*).

According to his biographer Frances Donaldson, these experiences stunted Plum emotionally. His "response to the rejection of his early demand for love was unusually direct. He simply detached himself from the cold and unrewarding world and retreated into fantasy. From the earliest age he was happiest alone with his own company, and in the absence of any family life or stimulus to the emotions, he cultivated his imagination in solitude." All his life, he found it agonisingly difficult to talk to anyone he didn't know well, and, "having no strong feeling for other people, often aped what he believed to be the proper response."

Family separations were not in themselves unusual (although Plum's age at the time certainly was): most children of parents who worked in the colonies were entrusted to relatives or strangers in England, to be educated there. Kipling felt abandoned and betrayed when this happened to him, a feeling magnified by the unthinking cruelty with which he was treated by his guardians. But, unlike him, Plum was to remember his childhood without rancour.

Upon leaving Dulwich College, he learned that his father could not afford to send him to university (Armine was already at Oxford). After a brief stint in the London office of the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank—his feelings about this job are probably reflected in *Psmith in the City* (1910)—he resolved to become a writer. Success came slowly but steadily. After 1909, he divided his time between England and the United States in order to pursue a second, very lucrative career in theatre as a writer of lyrics and scripts for musical comedy.

According to his biographer, these experiences stunted Plum emotionally. His "response to the rejection of his early demand for love was unusually direct. He simply detached himself from the cold and unrewarding world and retreated into fantasy."

He married in 1914, thereby acquiring a stepdaughter (there were no other children). From the First World War to his death in 1975, he wrote uninterruptedly and prolifically, earning enormous sums of money.

Plum and his wife Ethel were living in France when the Germans invaded, in May 1940. After a short period under house arrest, he was sent to an internment camp for enemy aliens: its inmates eventually ended up at the village of Tost in Germany. In June 1941, Plum was released from there and taken to Berlin, where he agreed to give radio broadcasts about this experience for audiences in the United States (still neutral at the time). The talks—there were five of them—recast the hardships and minor travails of camp life as farce. They contain no

hint of propaganda or even politics. It was rumoured that he had agreed to them in exchange for his freedom, but Donaldson shows this to be untrue, if only because internees over 60 became eligible for release and Plum's sixtieth birthday was only a few months away.

Plum always maintained that he did the broadcasts in order to get in touch with his American readers and thank those who had sent him letters and parcels in captivity. There is absolutely no reason to doubt this. But they also suggested, if only in passing, that his attitude to the war was one of unconcern. This was quite true: Donaldson reports a conversation from 1939 with her husband and Peter Cazalet (Plum's son-in-law) in which he remarked artlessly that "if the Germans want to govern the world, why don't we just let them?" The only aspects of the war Plum seemed to grasp were those that concerned him personally. Once in Berlin, he could not understand that his proposed broadcasts might cause offence—even though the Luftwaffe was bombing English cities and news of concentration camps was beginning to seep through.

Inevitably, they got him into trouble in Britain, where he was pilloried as a traitor (despite some voices raised in his defence). Four years later, Orwell ably exonerated him from anything bar stupidity and little new has been added to the discussion since then. Plum and Ethel remained in Germany until 1943 and occupied France after that, living with friends or in hotels. All this time, he kept working: by the time the war ended, he had four manuscripts ready to publish, with one (*Money in the Bank*) written during his internment.

Almost the first news they received when the Allies entered Paris in 1944 was of the death of their beloved daughter Leonora a year earlier (she had married and was living in England). Plum had been very fond of her. In 1947, they settled down for good in the United States. Plum never set foot in England again. He was warned he might be arrested if he went there and refused to travel even after the danger had passed. Fortunately, there was no wallowing in self-pity: in a letter from 1945 he writes, "I made an ass of myself, and must pay the penalty." The wartime broadcasts formed the chief event of his life, private or public, and were to cast a long shadow over it.

{FOUR}

DESPITE THE PRAISE lavished upon him, Wodehouse disliked critics in general as superfluous intermediaries between himself and his readers—even though he took care to thank some of them. In private, he resented the defence of his wartime conduct by Orwell: Donaldson says he regarded it "as a form of patronage." But this may have been because Orwell sounded tepid about the books

ARTHUR RACKHAM / WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

themselves. With Evelyn Waugh, whose admiration was unqualified, he struck up a warm epistolary friendship.

Wodehouse produced over ninety books during the course of an admittedly long life. Like most popular writers, he relied on a basic narrative template on which suitable changes could be rung. This template took time to perfect: twenty-one years divide *The Pothunters*, published in 1902, from *Leave it to Psmith*. All Wodehouse's books are crammed with formulaic elements and stock effects—like the child who speaks and behaves like an adult (but with very different ideas of reward). Stagy slang is deployed ad nauseam. The clichés of popular romance are imperfectly transposed into a comic key. The cast of stock characters include the imperturbable butler, the hard-boiled aunt (or uncle), the henpecked husband, the American millionaire and so on.

A typical Wodehouse plot involves different sets of characters engaged in shenanigans that

ABOVE: Arthur Rackham's illustration of the Mad Hatter's tea party in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. In a single chapter of the book, Lewis Carroll provides a comic deconstruction of time and an array of jokes about "words, words, words."

RIGHT: After the German invasion of France, Wodehouse was sent to an internment camp for enemy aliens. His subsequent decision to give radio broadcasts from Berlin was to cast a long shadow over his life.

AP PHOTO

build up to a common denouement. *Uncle Fred in the Springtime* brings together the romantic troubles of two sets of lovers, Pongo Twistleton's efforts to stave off his creditors, the Duke of Dunstable's determination to steal his host's pig, Lord Ickenham's insistence on solving other people's problems, and Lord Emsworth's difficulties with his sister and the Duke. Money is the fulcrum and leitmotif of all his plots: here, Lord Emsworth's pig becomes the lightning rod for this pecuniary mania.

By 1923, Wodehouse had arrived at the optimum structure for his comedies: a succession of scenes, composed mostly in dialogue, linked by brief bits of exposition. Each scene pushes the plot forward; the repartee sounds as quick and natural as dialogue written for the stage. The prose is rhythmic and effervescent, making free use of comic metaphor, literary allusions, invented slang and deliberate anachronisms. In *Uncle Fred in the Springtime*, the blameless Horace Davenport incurs the jealousy of Alaric "Ricky" Gilpin by persuading Ricky's fiancée to give him dancing lessons and injudiciously inviting her to a ball. Ricky also happens to be a poet, as Horace explains to Lord Ickenham, a.k.a Uncle Fred:

> "He said he was going to look in to-day and break my neck."
> "I didn't know poets broke people's necks."
> "Ricky does. He once took on three simultaneous costermongers in Covent Garden and cleaned them up in five minutes. He had gone there to get inspiration for a pastoral, and they started chi-iking him, and he sailed in and knocked them base over apex into a pile of Brussels sprouts."
> "How different from the home life of the late Lord Tennyson."

The end of the war marked a decline in the quality of Wodehouse's output. The effervescence gradually fades from his prose. The balance between exposition and dialogue breaks down. The plotting becomes mechanical, and subsidiary characters lose much of their zest and individuality. By *The Mating Season* (1949), Gussie Fink-Nottle has ceased to be a distinctive figure in his own right. Over the course of four books, Roderick Spode is transformed from a parody of Oswald Mosley, founder of the British Union of Fascists, into an anodyne Conservative peer.

Wodehouse's reading habits were indiscriminate. He disliked Jane Austen, Thomas Hardy and Balzac (which might perhaps be expected), but also, surprisingly, Dickens (in 1956, he wrote a friend saying he was "reading *Bleak House* for the first time and it isn't as lousy as I had expected") and *Tom Jones* ("my opinion is that it is lousy … Can you stand him?"). On the other hand, he was familiar with the Bible from boyhood, read Shakespeare diligently in middle age, liked Keats and Tennyson (but had mixed feelings about Shelley). For the most part, he devoured popular novels and detective stories: Agatha Christie dedicated one of her books to him "to show my pleasure in his

having been kind enough to tell me that he enjoys *my* books." The quotations that sprinkle his prose stemmed mostly from his boyhood reading, supplemented by "Bartlett's book of *Familiar Quotations*, that indispensable adjunct to literary success" (*Over Seventy*, 1956).

In her 1982 biography—authorised by his estate—Frances Donaldson estimated that nine-tenths of Wodehouse's admirers were (and presumably still are) men. She describes his world as a "purely masculine fantasy" on the grounds that it lacks any real love interest. The romantic scenes, she notes accurately, are forced and maudlin.

> Women appreciate wit ... and they have no objection to malice, but they are too subjective to be amused by the indiscriminate heartlessness of knockabout farce. Wodehouse puts all his literary grace, his talent for dialogue and his inspired humour entirely at the service of knockabout plots. This ... accounts for his appeal to a wide male readership as well as an intellectually distinguished one, but, with many exceptions to the rule, it puts him out of reach of the female sex.

To her, the characters of Psmith and Jeeves embody the kind of humour that appeals to women and men respectively. This sounds plausible, but it also leaves out the most striking aspect of Wodehouse's work: its assembly line of henpecked or hapless men bullied by masterful, wrong-headed wives, sisters, mothers and aunts. They inhabit a world whose imaginative contours are not so much masculine as *boyish*—a prepubescent, high-spirited, light-hearted world. It's not an accident that the most heartfelt tributes to Wodehouse come from male writers and critics: even a partial list would include such luminaries as Hilaire Belloc, Evelyn Waugh, Christopher Hitchens and Robert McCrum (who also wrote a biography).

{FIVE}

THE ENGLISH COMIC TRADITION goes all the way back to the eighteenth century, not long after the novel was naturalised into English. Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, published in instalments over eight years, made him famous across Europe. The first experimental novel in the language, it's chock-full of bawdy jokes, arcane learning, elaborate digressions, and complex narrative and typographical tricks. But Sterne's real métier is the affectionate delineation of human foibles. Every conceivable situation becomes a pretext for comedy: the difficulty of writing an autobiography, theories of conception, the design of model fortifications, seduction and sex. Penelope Fitzgerald described it as free association on a grand scale, ostensibly grounded in "Locke's claim that the mind's association of ideas is based on something other than reason."

Tristram Shandy is also shrewd, wise and surprisingly tender for a man who disclaimed all profundity. The famous episode of Uncle Toby and the fly that "tormented him cruelly all dinnertime" is a case in point:

> I'll not hurt thee, says my uncle Toby, rising from his chair, and going a-cross the room, with the fly in his hand. I'll not hurt a hair of thy head. Go, says he, lifting up the sash, and opening his hand as he spoke, to let it escape; go, poor Devil, get thee gone, why should I hurt thee? This world surely is wide enough to hold both thee and me.

The nineteenth century saw the flowering of the comic novel. A high point is reached in the dialogue novels of Thomas Love Peacock, a somewhat acerbic colleague of the utilitarian philosophers James Mill and John Stuart Mill at East India House. In his work, the comic mode is employed to skewer received ideas and intellectual fashions. A friend of Shelley and an energetic advocate of reform, Peacock created a remarkable gallery of characters to parody theories and attitudes espoused by well-known figures including Shelley, Coleridge, Byron and Jeremy Bentham.

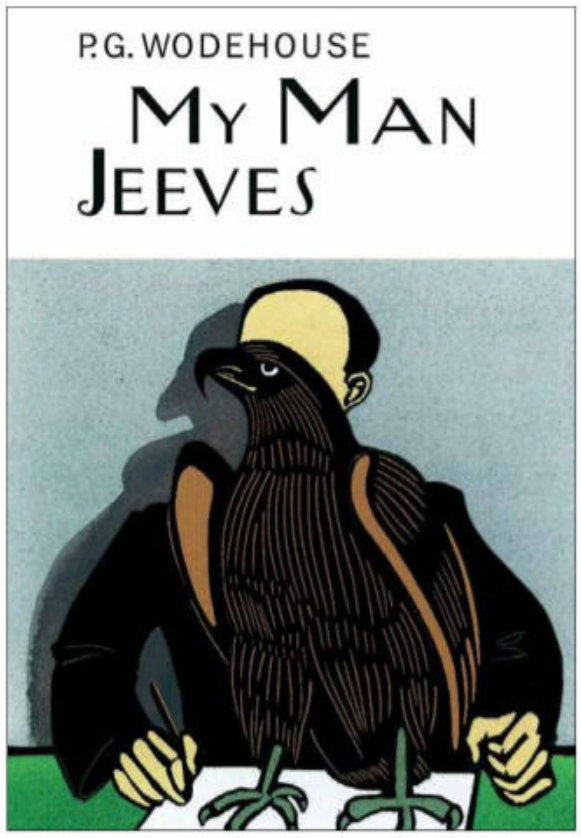
Mark Twain mined a new vein of black comedy in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*. The Oxford don Charles Dodgson (under the pseudonym of Lewis Carroll) produced *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass*, surely two

Wodehouse's sunlit world is defined by the absence of ideas. Its surface aspects may belong to the Edwardian period, but the characters are products of pure fantasy. Their words and acts are as stylised as a dance.

of the greatest triumphs of the genre. They mark the irruption of dream-logic, the nursery rhyme and nursery tale, popular pastiche and much else into literature. Their sheer novelty and subsequent reputation tend to obscure the subtle comedy that pervades the narrative, the skill and inventiveness of the wordplay. In a single chapter of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, Carroll provides a comic deconstruction of time and an array of jokes about "words, words, words." Here is the sleepy Dormouse retailing a story about three girls who lived in a treacle-well:

> "And so these three little sisters—they were learning to draw, you know—"
> "What did they draw?" said Alice, quite forgetting her promise.
> "Treacle," said the Dormouse, without considering at all this time.
> "I want a clean cup," interrupted the Hatter: "let's all move one place on."
> ...
> Alice did not wish to offend the Dormouse again, so she began very cautiously: "But I don't understand. Where did they draw the treacle from?"
> "You can draw water out of a water-well," said the Hatter; "so I should think you could draw treacle out of a treacle-well—eh, stupid?"
> "But they were *in* the well," Alice said to the Dormouse, not choosing to notice this last remark.
> "Of course they were," said the Dormouse; "—well in."

What of the twentieth century? EF Benson and Evelyn Waugh were Wodehouse's contemporaries during

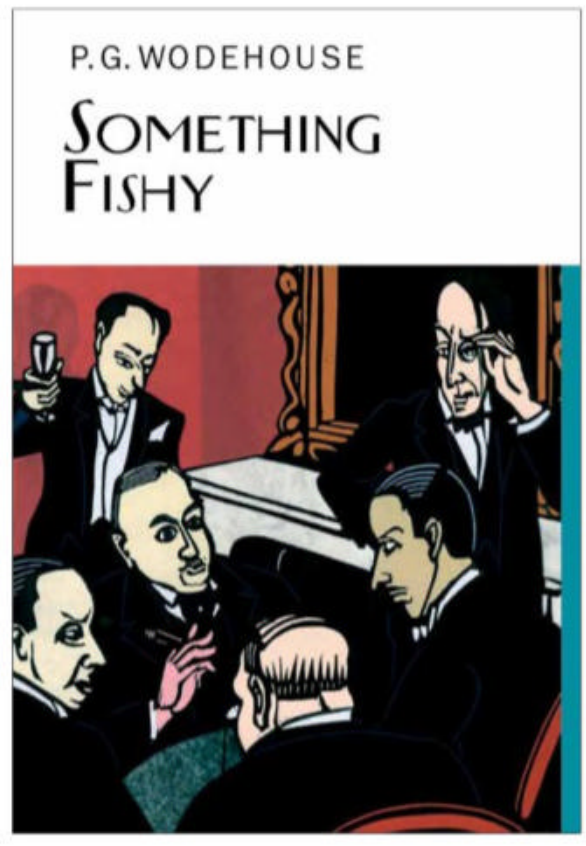


the 1920s and 1930s; after the Second World War, the comic novel came to be reimagined by Barbara Pym and JL Carr, among others. Most of its practitioners stuck to English settings, but one of the very best writers of the postwar generation was to range much further afield. JG Farrell was half English and half Anglo-Irish; his father worked for some years in India before being invalided back home. This background may have contributed to his characteristically slant-eyed view of the British Empire in its periodic episodes of crisis and dissolution. For Farrell takes what appear to be, on the face of it, unpromising subjects for comic treatment—the last uprising against British rule in Ireland, the Indian Mutiny of 1857–58, the events leading up to the Japanese conquest of Malaya and Singapore in 1942—using them to dissect imperial ideas and attitudes with unfailing verve and humour.

Troubles charts the death throes of colonialism in Ireland, by showing the opposed attitudes of rulers and the ruled with scarcely anything by way of comment. It's a story related largely from the viewpoint of the English and their Anglo-Irish allies: bumbling and well-meaning or rabidly aggressive as the case may be, caught up in obsessions that drive the comedy while the country erupts in flames around them. The writing is alternately comic and elegiac, and always brilliantly inventive. In *The Siege of Krishnapur*, the conventional justifications for colonialism are personified in the figure of the Collector: the novel traces the gradual waning of his illusions during the long and bloody siege of the Residency. *The Singapore Grip* lays bare the economic foundations of empire—the swelling flood of migrant workers spilling over countries and continents, the human costs of the process and its sudden unravelling—through a superb gallery of fictional characters.

Farrell's prose is marked by vivid, surreal flashes reminiscent of Bulgakov. The chief setting of *Troubles* is the Hotel Majestic, a huge building at the edge of the sea, in the throes of terminal decay, where few guests arrive any longer. Its inarticulate hero, still suffering from the lingering effects of shell shock, has made his way to Ireland to meet his fiancée Angela (although he's not quite sure that they are, in fact, engaged). Their first meeting takes place in the Palm Court.

> The foliage, the Major continued to notice as he took his seat, was really amazingly thick; there were creepers not only dangling from above but also running in profusion over the floor, leaping out to seize any unwary object that remained in one place for too long. A standard lamp at his elbow, for instance, had been throttled by a snake of greenery that had circled up its slender metal stem as far as the black bulb that crowned it like a bulging eyeball. It had no shade and the bulb he assumed to be dead until, to his astonishment, Angela fumbled among the dusty leaves and switched it on, presumably so that she could take a good look at him. Whether or not she was dismayed by what she saw she switched it off again with a sigh after a moment and the gloom returned.



{SIX}

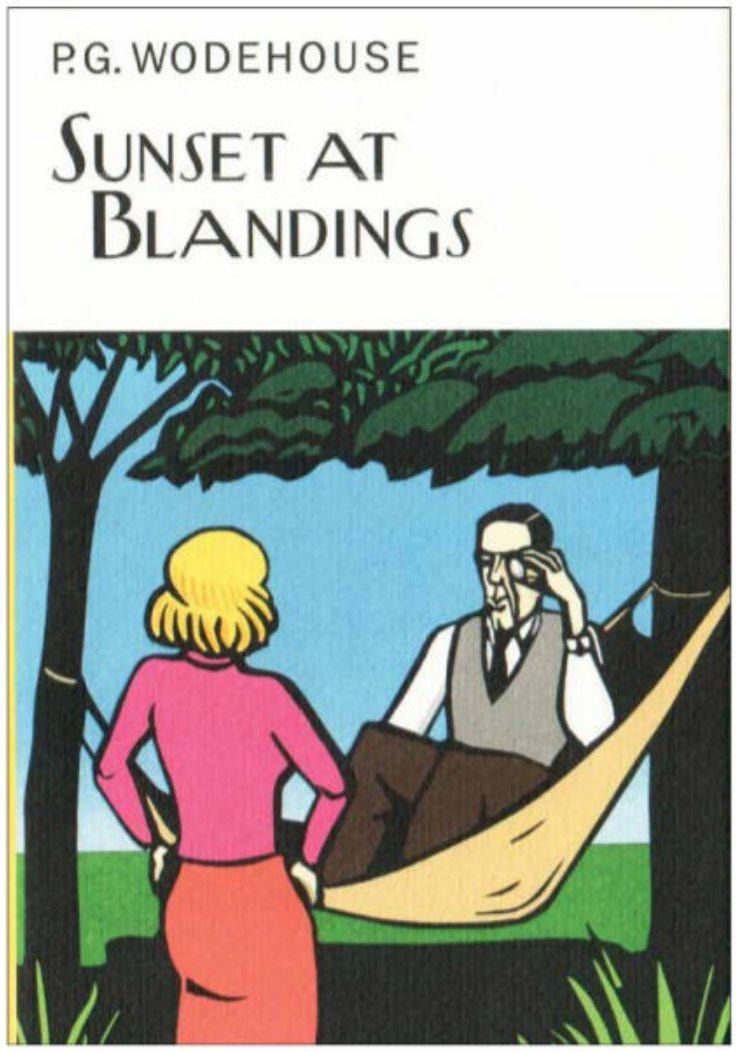
FROM AROUND THE TIME of the First World War, it became useful (if not entirely accurate) to pigeonhole novelists as popular, serious or avant-garde. Few gifted writers would enjoy the critical and commercial success of Hardy or Henry James; some found it difficult even to get their work published. Despite early praise for *Sons and Lovers*, Lawrence was dogged to the end of his life by accusations of obscenity. James Joyce and Samuel Beckett became famous in their own lifetimes for writing books that few people read—Stendhal, by contrast, had to wait until long after his death to be hailed as a master.

What of the comic novel? Sterne, Carroll and Twain had written in expectation of a mass audience, but this was no longer the case with most of their successors. In the 1960s (after six modestly received novels), publishers began rejecting Barbara Pym's work on the grounds that it did not sell; her seventh novel came out in 1977, after an enforced silence of 16 years. It was only after winning the Booker Prize in 1973 (for *The Siege of Krishnapur*) that Farrell managed to make a modest living as a writer. Wodehouse's ability to combine critical praise with extravagant commercial success reveals not just the nature of his genius but also its limitations.

Penelope Fitzgerald's father, EV Knox, edited *Punch* from 1932 to 1949: in her essay on the magazine's demise, she divides humourists into the fat, the thin and the crazy. The thin ones are "resentful, indignant, clear-sighted, possibly savage"; they skewer received ideas and pretensions, expose what their compatriots would prefer to ignore. The crazy ones, like Sterne, practise free association. The fat ones, like Trollope and Wodehouse, "seem to make the sun

shine." Their books provide, "as thin men's books don't, consolation."

Wodehouse's sunlit world is defined by the absence of ideas. Its surface aspects may belong to the Edwardian period, but the characters are products of pure fantasy. Their words and acts are as stylised as a dance—unlike Alice, who resembles our idea of a little girl, albeit a very unusual one. In the 1930s, Belloc famously described Wodehouse as "the best living writer of English" for his mastery in fitting means to ends. "The end of writing is the production in the reader's mind of a certain image and a certain emotion," he wrote. The means are words, and "the complete use of that medium is the choosing



of the right words and the putting of them into the right order. It is *this* which Mr. Wodehouse does better, in the English language, than anyone else alive."

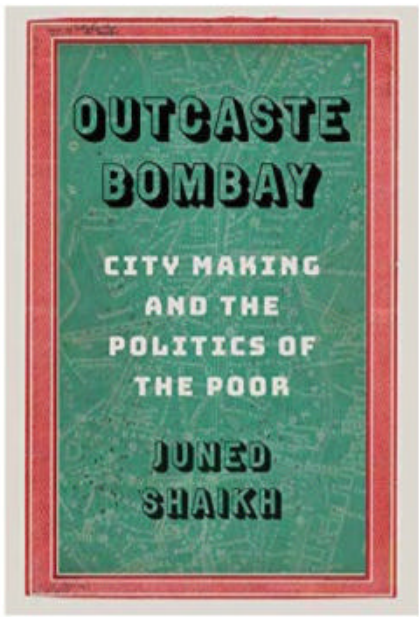
But this is an odd definition of greatness even with respect to the comic novel. When applied to any other kind, it slips like sand through the fingers. The ability to mould language to one's ends is indispensable to writing well: it's the mark of every great—and many good—writers. Lawrence, Joyce and Beckett were no worse at it than Wodehouse was (and arguably rather better, given the complex and variegated nature of *their* ends). Moreover, it assumes that the sole function of the comic novel is to make us laugh. But laughter itself is protean. It can be uproarious, gentle or biting; used to provoke thought or to submerge it. It is capable of enlarging our imaginations (as in *Tristram Shandy* or *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*), giving us food for thought (as in *Huckleberry Finn* or *The Singapore Grip*) or showing social relations in an unexpected light (as in *Excellent Women* or *How Steeple Sinderby Wanderers Won the FA Cup*).

Wodehouse does none of these things—nor, to be fair, did he set out to. Instead, he creates a world perfect in its own way, one that allows us briefly to forget the imperfections of our own. The consolation of reading *The Code of the Woosters* is like the childhood consolation of watching a circus or carnival: a glittering array of perfectly judged tricks floating on a sea of bright lights and brilliant colours. The relationship between Bertie and Jeeves is a variation on that of Don Quixote and Sancho Panza (where the master is crazy but wise and the servant sensible but credulous). For the rest, Wodehouse's imagination worked chiefly by exclusion, manipulating the same elements across many decades and books.

Philip Hensher does him more than justice, though I can only dissent from his more purple passages. It does not seem to me that there is "an extraordinary complexity" in Wodehouse's work. His plots are easy to summarise, and the mood, atmosphere and emotion of his books are not at all "difficult to pin down exactly." In another place, Hensher extols the joys of "comfort reading," or inhabiting "an enclosed fictional world, with its own rules, its own charm, music and flavour." His chosen examples include Wodehouse, Conan Doyle, the Chesterton of the Father Brown stories and Elmore Leonard: the joys are presumably like the pleasures of gluttony but without the guilt.

A born writer with a demanding work ethic, Wodehouse kept publishing long after staleness set in. The best of his work remains elegant, satisfying and consolatory: *Leave it to Psmith*, *Right Ho, Jeeves*, *The Code of the Woosters*, *Uncle Fred in the Springtime* and the short stories in *Ukridge* (1924), *Carry on, Jeeves* (1925), *Very Good, Jeeves* (1930) and *Blandings Castle* (1935). All of them can be found in the Everyman Wodehouse: an edition of his complete works in hardcover—every single book, no matter how obscure—with dazzling covers by Andrzej Klimowski. These linocuts with their bright colours and incisive lines, many of them perfectly judged and wonderfully symbolic, are true to the spirit of Wodehouse in a way no previous illustrator has managed to be. Every word he wrote for public consumption is now in print: a kind of apotheosis in itself. What writer, when all is said and done, could ask for more? ■

THIS SPREAD:
Andrzej Klimowski's linocut covers are wonderfully symbolic and especially true to the spirit of Wodehouse.

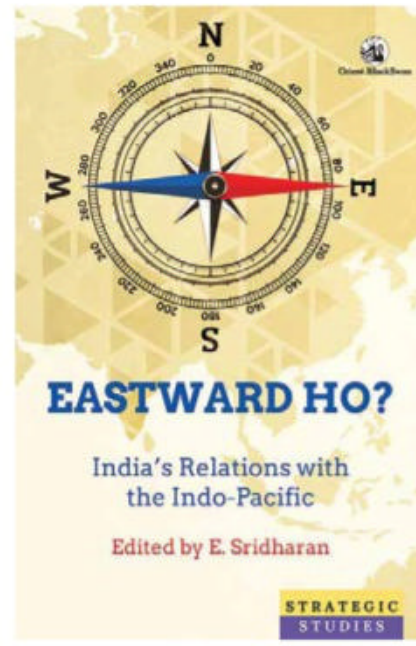


OUTCASTE BOMBAY
CITY MAKING AND THE POLITICS OF THE POOR

Juned Shaikh

This text examines the workings of caste and capitalism in Mumbai. Using English and Marathi sources, it looks at literature and political theory, as well as the history of urban planning, labour, housing, social welfare and land tenures, to study the relations between communities in the sprawling city.

ORIENT BLACKSWAN, ₹995, 240 PAGES

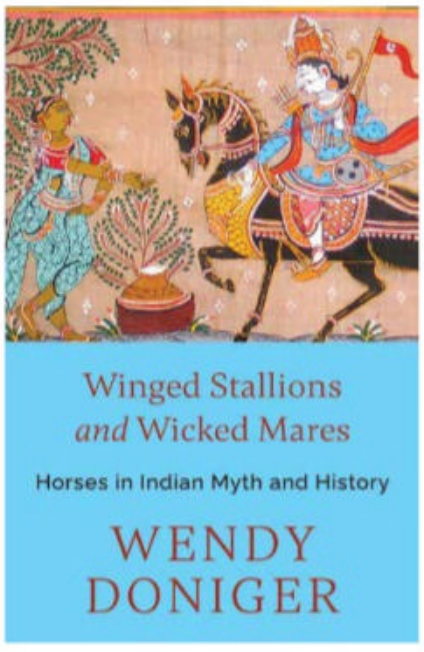


EASTWARD HO?
INDIA'S RELATIONS WITH THE INDO-PACIFIC

Edited by E Sridharan

This volume studies India's relations with countries to its east, with writings from scholars on issues including the "Look East Policy" in the early 1990s, economic integration and India's dynamic with China, Korea, Singapore, Japan and others.

ORIENT BLACKSWAN, ₹1,650, 512 PAGES

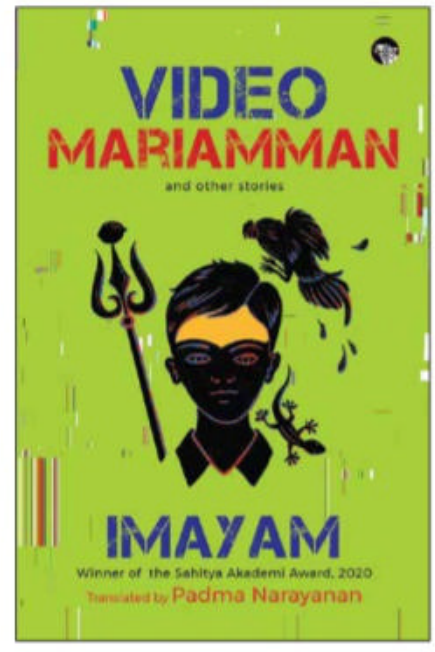


WINGED STALLIONS AND WICKED MARES
HORSES IN INDIAN MYTH AND HISTORY

Wendy Doniger

In this book, Doniger traces the place of the horse in Indian history and culture, from the arrival of the Indo-Europeans to the Mughals and the British. The book examines how the horse—which was not indigenous to India—was imported, how it became entrenched in mythology and how European standards were imposed on Indian breeds.

SPEAKING TIGER, ₹699, 350 PAGES

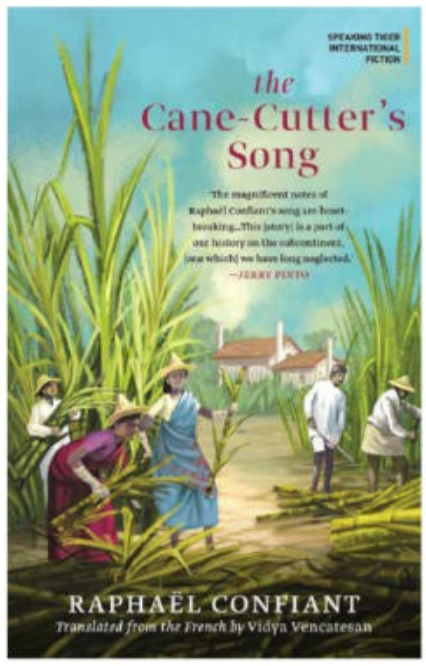


VIDEO MARIAMMAN AND OTHER STORIES

Imayam
Translated by Padma Narayanan

The 14 short stories in this collection include ones about a girl from a family of magicians who was abducted as an adolescent; the death of a music prodigy; a brewing riot involving an idol procession and the ways casteism is embedded into daily interactions. This translation of Imayam's 2008 collection explores caste, death, love, music and patriarchy and how they play out in rural Tamil Nadu.

SPEAKING TIGER, ₹499, 320 PAGES

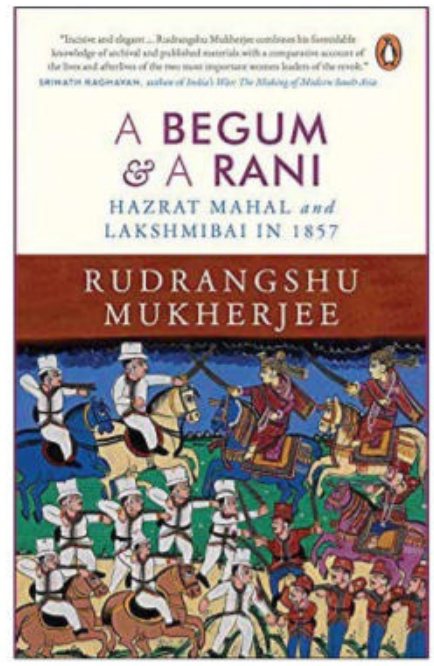

SPEAKING TIGER
INTERNATIONAL FICTION
the Cane-Cutter's Song
'The magnificent notes of Raphaël Confiant's song are heart-breaking...This [story] is a part of... our history on the subcontinent, [one which] we have long neglected.'
—JERRY PINTO
RAPHAËL CONFIANT
Translated from the French by Vidya Vencatesan

THE CANE-CUTTER'S SONG

Raphaël Confiant
Translated by Vidya Vencatesan

Originally published as *La panse du chacal*, the book provides insights into West Indian identity and culture, while drawing on the lives of Indians who began to be transported to the Caribbean following the abolition of slavery within the British Empire.

SPEAKING TIGER, ₹499, 288 PAGES

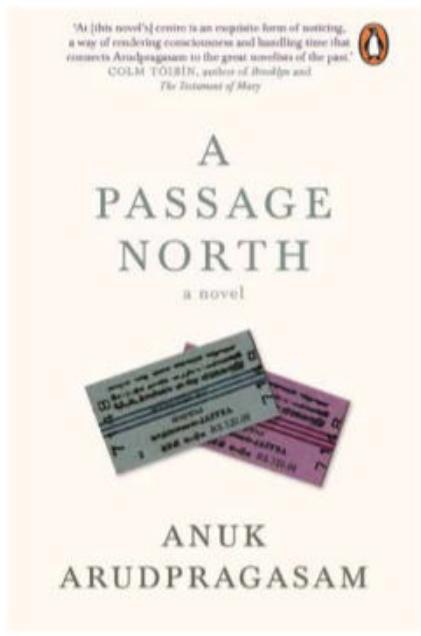


A BEGUM AND A RANI
HAZRAT MAHAL AND LAKSHMIBAI IN 1857

Rudrangshu Mukherjee

This book explores the roles played by Begum Hazrat Mahal of Awadh and Rani Lakshmibai of Jhansi in the 1857 revolt against the British. It focusses on their lives and afterlives, examining why Lakshmibai became a celebrated nationalist icon while Hazrat Mahal, who had led the uprising in Awadh, died in relative obscurity became largely forgotten in public memory.

ALLEN LANE INDIA, PENGUIN, ₹599, 256 PAGES

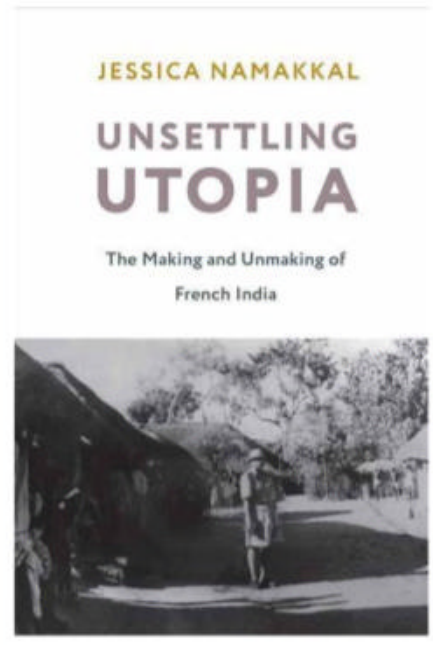


A PASSAGE NORTH

Anuk Arudpragasam

This novel follows Krishan, a Tamil man who, after studying in India and working at an NGO in Colombo, becomes increasingly preoccupied with civilians' photo archives of massacres in north-eastern Sri Lanka as well as a sense of guilt for having been spared. Beginning with an email from a former lover and a telephone call that compels him to travel to the north, this novel becomes a meditation on love, war and loss.

HAMISH HAMILTON INDIA, PENGUIN, ₹599, 304 PAGES



UNSETTLING UTOPIA
THE MAKING AND UNMAKING OF FRENCH INDIA

Jessica Namakkal

Following India's independence, five territories remained governed by France until 1962. This study presents an account of the history of twentieth-century French colonial projects, examining themes surrounding borders, exile and citizenship as well as histories of the Aurobindo ashram and Auroville.

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY PRESS, ₹2,600, 328 PAGES

Editor's Pick

TAO-CHUAN YEH / AFP / GETTY IMAGES

ON 14 AUGUST 1992, three Taiwanese women hold a press conference to recount their experiences as "comfort women"—a euphemistic term for over a hundred thousand women forced into sex work by the Japanese army during the Second World War. The *chongsindae* system of brothels set up for exclusive use by Japanese soldiers, in order to prevent the spread of venereal disease among soldiers and reduce incidents of sexual assault, began during the 1932 occupation of Shanghai. Following the mass rapes during the Nanjing Massacre of 1937, all Japanese military contingents in China were directed to set up "comfort stations."

Chongsindae recruitment followed two methods: local leaders in occupied territories were asked to supply young women, while recruiting agents—brothel owners and labour contractors—sourced women from Japan and its major colonies, Korea and Taiwan, through deception, intimidation and abduction. Although Allied forces were aware of the practice, chongsindae was not brought up at the Tokyo war-crimes tribunal after the Japanese defeat. A separate tribunal in the Dutch East Indies convicted 11 people for forcing Dutch women to work at comfort stations.

The Korean feminist scholar Yun Chung-ok brought international attention to the issue through her research on former comfort women. In 1990, she helped form the Korean Council for the Women Drafted for Military Sexual Slavery by Japan. The council pressured the Korean government to raise the issue with Japan and persuaded Kim Hak-sun, a former comfort woman, to give public testimony a year before the Taiwanese press conference. It also organised numerous lawsuits, but the courts held that bilateral agreements with the United States and Korea indemnified Japan from further compensation claims arising from wartime events. In 1995, the Japanese government set up the Asian Women's Fund, which compensated 285 women with 2 million yen each and an apology signed by the country's prime minister.

HONDA

ENEOS

Japan's No.1 Oil Company

HIGH PERFORMANCE ENGINE OIL

Best fit for Honda Motorcycles & Scooters

Now In New Attractive Pack

Trust of Japan from 2 Japanese Giants

MB Oil for Scooters available in 800ml

MA Oil for Bikes available in 800 ml & 1L

Outstanding Engine Wear Protection | *Better Cleaning of Engine* | *Provide Longer Engine Life* | *Improved Fuel Economy*

Use ENEOS Honda Scooterz Oil for AT Scooters for maximum performance and fuel economy. Performance guaranteed by Honda Japan.

Scan for Website

Scan for Facebook

MANUFACTURED & MARKETED BY: TIDE WATER OIL CO. (INDIA) LTD. UNDER THE AUTHORITY OF: ENEOS CORPORATION, JAPAN.
For business enquiry of ENEOS Lubricants, please contact: (Office) +91-124-4379-260, North: +91 9953311975, East: +91 9692225550, West: +91 9769045628, South: +91 9840399949, write to us at: sales@eneosindia.com

BIG. BOLD. BEAUTIFUL.

NISSAN MAGNITE

WINNING HEARTS & AWARDS

NISSAN

AUTOCAR
VALUE FOR MONEY CAR OF THE YEAR-2021

TopGear
COMPACT SUV OF THE YEAR-2021

#IgniteYourCarisma

**INSPIRED BY INDIA
ENGINEERED IN JAPAN**

EXPERIENCE BIG

First-in-segment
17.78 cm TFT Advanced
Drive Assist Display

Powerful HRA0 1.0L
Turbo Engine

One-class-above Roominess

336L Cargo Space with 60:40 Split

EXPERIENCE BOLD

Fun to drive
HRA0 X-Tronic CVT

Best-in-class
Around View Monitor

EXPERIENCE BEAUTIFUL

Wireless Connectivity to
Android Auto & Apple CarPlay

Ergonomic Cockpit Layout

*T&C Apply

TO BOOK: Log on to www.nissan.in | Book Nissan Magnite | Visit your nearest Nissan dealership

Also available in CSD

WhatsApp us for enquiries: 7065233336

1800 209 3456

NISSAN INTELLIGENT MOBILITY

www.nissan.in | virtualshowroom.nissan.in

/NissanIndia | /Nissan_India | /Nissan_India